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The TEACHINGS of
JESUS *in* PARABLES



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O the memory of
the late Archibald
Duff, D.D., of Sher-
brooke, Que., from
whom I derived my
first ideals of Scripture
exposition, this volume
is reverently dedicated.

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Interpretation of the Parables

Interpretation *of the* Parables

A story is the universal language of humanity. Idioms, proverbs, words, often lose their significance by translation from one language to another, or their meaning becomes obscured by the natural development of the language in which they were uttered. But a story is the same in all times and tongues. It is a living embodiment of truth. Its charm is perennial. Its meaning is undimmed by the passing of the years, and age abates nothing of its force.

The "Fables of Æsop" speak just as plainly and as effectively to the English or American mind of the present day as they did to the Greek mind of twenty-five centuries ago; while the utterances of Plato and Socrates and even the poems and plays of their time have long been a dead language to most men. The "Arabian Nights" stories have lost none of their original fascination by traveling from East to West, from century to century, from language to language, though there is little else in the literature of Persia or Arabia that excites our interest or touches our life. Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" still charm every reader with their pictures of old English life and thought, although the writings of the philosophers and preachers of Chaucer's day have long since become dull and meaningless. The character, the history, the religion of any nation is best learned through the medium of its folk-lore.

What need, then, to reiterate the trite question, Why did Jesus speak in parables? How else, pray, should he speak? How else make himself clearly understood by all men everywhere and throughout all time? Jesus was the

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universal Teacher. He spoke to the world; therefore he used the world language. He chose that form of teaching which would be most plain to the unlearned, most stimulating to the thoughtful, and most attractive to all; that form which would convey the truth most forcibly and preserve it most securely.

There is also another reason. As true education is not pouring knowledge into the mind, but rather drawing out the mind itself, so salvation is not something bestowed from without, but rather the quickening and development of spiritual life already existing but dormant in the soul. It follows that the most valuable truth, the truth that does the most good either intellectually or spiritually, is that which we think out for ourselves. Ready-made truth adds little to our mental power or equipment. Character cannot be perfected by the mere teaching of another, even though he be the Christ. It is the fruit of personal effort, the outgrowth of personal conviction. So Jesus would set men thinking. Having given them a groundwork of elementary truth, he would stimulate them to seek for more truth on their own account. Having plainly declared the underlying principles upon which his kingdom rests, he would have them work out the specific problems for themselves. Only in this way could the spiritual growth and progress of his disciples be assured. And the parable is the best possible means for accomplishing his purpose.

To the thoughtless hearer a story is of little worth. Who reads a fable and blinks the moral is no better for his reading. We are, in fact, often made worse by thoughtless reading and hearing. Your frivolous novel reader, for example, who reads for the story alone, vitiates both character and intellect by the habit; but he who sees in every tale a picture of life or a disclosure of truth, reads to some purpose. He is made wiser and better by everything that he reads, whether it be history or myth, poem or novel. For him the flowers of literature yield

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not only perfume and beauty, but rich store of honey as well. Or, again, your careless hearer of the gospel, and there are multitudes of such hearers, who hears only to admire or criticize, and never to apply and practise, becomes gradually gospel-hardened, and the truth which should be a savor of life unto life is transformed to be the savor of death unto death.

This is a universal law of nature. The food which gives strength to the laboring man and fits him the better for his toil, may bring discomfort and sickness to the luxurious idler. The weight which builds up the muscles of the athlete would crush the child. The problem whose solution strengthens the mind of the reasoner only makes him the more parrot-like and mechanical who takes his solution from his neighbor. In other words, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

No teaching ever uttered has been more simple than the parables of Jesus, yet none has been more woefully distorted. They have been made the stalking-horse for all kinds of false doctrine and not a little sheer nonsense besides. Every such miscarriage of their purpose has resulted, however, not from any real obscurity in the parables themselves, but from false methods of interpretation, from carelessness in treatment, and from a too free use of the imagination. Curiously enough the majority of expositors depart frequently from the rules and principles which they themselves lay down at the beginning of their work, being led astray by the influence of tradition, the seductions of profound scholarship, or the temptations of indolence. It is not so necessary, therefore, to frame new rules of interpretation as it is to re-

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state those now commonly accepted and to insist upon strict adherence to them. And this latter is not so easy a matter as it would seem, in view of the conventional interpretations that have become familiar to every Bible student, the influence of which it is difficult to escape. All rules of interpretation must grow out of the nature of the parable and the purpose for which it was uttered.

The purpose of the parable we have already discussed. What of its nature?

What is a parable? A story? Not always, though it always partakes of the nature of a story. A mere figure of speech? Usually more than that. A fable? No; for it is not necessarily impossible. A myth? No; for it may be true. A parable is a word-picture. As such it may represent a real scene or an imaginary one, a probable occurrence or an improbable one. It may take any of the varied forms which we observe in the products of brush or pencil. It may resemble the "Christ before Pilate" or "The Last Supper," with every detail carefully wrought out and finished; or it may be like a Japanese picture consisting merely of a half dozen suggestive lines and much left to the imagination. It may be the full canvas of "The Prodigal Son" or "The Ten Virgins"; or it may be a hasty sketch of "The Lost Sheep," or the mere "study" of the "Unclean Spirit" in Matt. 12:43-45. In any case it is the embodiment of one central thought to which all details are subordinate. It is not a string of pearls, or a connected series of truths. It is a single gem with such setting or background as shall display it to the best advantage. The parable is like a lens, which gathers many of the sun's rays and brings them to a focus upon a single point. It is like a circle with many radii of detail meeting at the center, and this center it is which the expositor is concerned to find.

Of course, I am aware that this definition of the parable is somewhat elastic. It could not be otherwise, for

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it is impossible to draw hard and fast lines between this and other rhetorical figures, and there must ever remain a few utterances which will occupy the borderland between parable and trope, and concerning which each expositor must exercise the right of private judgment. With the scholar who defines "parable" differently I have no quarrel, but I have a serious quarrel with him who wastes, in arguing for his definition, time and thought that might be spent far more profitably upon the study of the parables themselves.

For the perfect interpretation of our Lord's parables but two conditions are requisite. They are (*a*) a child-like receptiveness of mind, unprejudiced and eager, and (*b*) thoughtful attention that looks beyond the mere story or picture and seeks to discover the truth which it embodies. Besides these two conditions alone, nothing is needed but the most ordinary intelligence.

The great danger is that we shall read too much into the parable and not enough *out of* it, that we shall seek an independent message in each minute detail, and that we shall try to square the whole with our preconceived notions of truth and righteousness. We are prone to forget that we are dealing with a simple story or sketch, and look upon it as a dark riddle. This is the frequent mistake of scholars. Take for illustration the "Essential Conditions of Interpretation," as laid down by Dr. Arnot. He says: "Of the parables it is particularly true that faith is necessary to the full appreciation of their meaning. Another cognate requisite is sympathy with the view which Jesus took of human nature in its fallen state. Subordinate qualifications are: 1. The faculty of perceiving and appreciating analogies. 2. A stern logic. 3. Some competent acquaintance, not only with the Scriptures, but also with the doctrines which the Scriptures contain, arranged in a dogmatic system. 4. Some knowledge of relative history, topography and customs."

Who, then, is sufficient for these things? Here is

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scholarship and the habit of exposition run wild. "Logic!" Then the parables are not for the average woman. "Dogmatic theology!" That closes the door on most of the laity and some of the clergy as well. "Ancient history, topography, customs!" Many of us are too busy to learn much of these. If one must possess all of these qualifications in order to interpret them, how foolish of our Lord to have uttered the parables to the multitude! Not one in a thousand of his immediate hearers possessed all of these qualifications. Few possessed any of them. And the same is true of those who have read the parables in subsequent ages. Yet he embodied the bulk of his gospel in parables, and they have been understood by common people in all ages.

No, no! We must cast aside the lumber of the schools, the microscopical analysis of grammar and lexicon, the massive enginery of scientific and historical study, and we must take the parables in their simplicity, or we shall surely miss the lessons they were intended to teach. Do not misunderstand me. I would not belittle the value of scholarship and research. Not at all. But I say that these may be and often are misused in the interpretation of Jesus' teachings. It is well to know all about "values" and "tones" in color, and to understand the laws of perspective and much more that pertains to the art of painting; yet one may be able to appreciate and enjoy a fine picture without any of these things. And on the other hand, one thoroughly instructed in them all may lose the best effect of some fine production through excessive attention to technical criticism. In the same way an undue regard for scholarly tradition and methods may obscure simple truth which the untrammelled mind would grasp in a moment.

The essential truth of a parable is that which lies plainly upon its surface. Any other truths which we may draw from it are merely incidental, and have no basis of Christly authority. The lesson of every parable

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is that which appears as readily to the mind of a child as to that of the mature and careful scholar.

But why study the parables if they are so simple? Why, indeed? Because the value of a parable does not depend upon the new and varied truth that we are able to extort from it, but upon our progressive and practical application of its single truth to our daily life. The marvels of kaleidoscopic interpretation and the adornments of scholarly research that appear in most writings on the parables are indicative of shallow and discursive thought rather than of profound insight. It requires more thought and concentration to develop the one truth that lies in the parable than it does to read into it any number of truths, however ingenious, that have no proper place there.

How, then, shall we interpret the parables? The answer has already been given, at least by implication. We must strive to emphasize and to apply the one truth which the parable plainly teaches. We are not concerned with the details which are necessary to make a complete story. If we treat the details at all, it must be to make them tributary to the central thought. We must show how they lead up to that and help to make its bearing plain. We must remember that the parable is a lens in which we catch many rays of divine truth and focus them upon a single point. And the more perfectly they are focused the greater will be the effect.

An old story is in point, of an artist who had painted "The Last Supper." A friend seeing the picture spoke with admiration of some exquisite tracery in a subordinate part. The painter immediately dashed his brush upon it and blotted it out, exclaiming, "Nothing must be seen but the face of the Lord! The rest is designed only to draw attention to that!" So in the word-picture; if there be not unity of effect its purpose is stultified.

This canon of interpretation is generally acknowledged in theory, but few adhere to it in practise with real strict-

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ness. Too often the parables are made fields for the exercise of the fancy, and we have such expositions as this of the parable of "The Good Samaritan:"—"The man who fell among thieves was Adam; the thieves were the devil and his angels; the priest and the Levite were the Mosaic dispensation; the good Samaritan was Christ himself; the oil and the wine were the comforts and blessings of the Gospel; the beast on which he rode was the humanity of Christ; the setting of the wounded man thereon was his vicarious salvation; the inn was the Church; and the two pence, the life that now is and the life to come." A marvel of expository genius this, truly! But where in all this play of the fancy do we find an answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" And the parable had no other purpose than to answer that question.

Again, parables are made a broad and shady pasture for weary minds. Men treat them after the method of running exposition, because it is easier than to hold the mind to a single topic. What is the result? What could it be but confusion and mistiness? It is simply absurd to treat the parables by what is commonly known as the "expository" method. Suppose an art teacher were giving to his class a critique of some great painting. Can you imagine him gravely beginning at the left of the picture and discussing it line by line, figure by figure, till he reached the right side, and perhaps saying nothing at all with reference to the plan and purpose and meaning of the picture as a whole? "Ridiculous!" you say. Of course it is. Yet that is what men frequently do with the parables, and call it treating them by the "expository" method. What a libel on exposition!

The true interpretation of a parable is not expository in this sense, but *topical*. It looks first of all to find the central thought which the parable was designed to embody, and it treats every detail with reference to its bear-

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ing upon this thought. For example, the parable of "The Sower" clusters about the words, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." The one purpose of its fourfold picture is to impress upon every individual in the Master's audience the necessity of personal attention to the truth. *

Treated by the usual method, the parables of "The Tares of the Field" and the "Drag-net" cover much common ground. Treated topically they are wholly distinct. The former inculcates present tolerance toward error; the latter is a promise of the ultimate separation between truth and error, good and evil. The parables of "The Mustard Seed" and "The Leaven" are also frequently confused. Deal with them after the method of verbal exegesis, and they are, as one has said, "in the main coincident." But if we study them as living expressions each of a single thought we shall find that the great Teacher did not repeat himself unnecessarily. The Mustard Seed teaches the lesson of *growth*, the Leaven, the lesson of *influence*. The Wonderful Growth of God's Kingdom is the subject of the one parable; the Pervasive Influence of the Kingdom is the subject of the other. At what part do these topics coincide?

Again, we hear a great deal about the parable of "The Hidden Treasure" and the parable of "The Pearl of Great Price," titles which of themselves indicate a confusion of the truths involved. Yet these are really independent pictures. The central figure of the former is the *treasure*. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure," says the Master. Your typical expositor, when he comes to this parable, begins straightway with a series of questions as to the application of the word "hidden" to the kingdom of God, the significance of the "field," whether the man found the treasure by chance, whether he did right in concealing it, etc. Now all these details are necessary to the completeness of the story, but they have nothing to do with its lesson excepting to concentrate attention upon the central figure and to aid in inter-

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preting that more vividly. As well discuss the contents of the wheelbarrow in Millet's "Angelus," or the material of the table-cloth in Da Vinci's "Last Supper" as to turn the thought upon these literary details of the parable. The treasure—*the treasure*—that is the object to keep in mind. And the only legitimate use of the parable is to make it a text for a discourse upon "The Supreme Value of the Kingdom of Heaven."

Now as to the second parable of this couplet: What is it? The parable of "The Pearl of Great Price"? No, The Master does not say, "The kingdom of heaven is *like a pearl*." He might have said so and truthfully; but he did not. What he did say is this: "The kingdom of heaven is like *a merchantman*." Properly, therefore, it is the parable of "The Merchantman," or, if you choose, "The Merchantman and the Pearl." The focus of the preceding parable is the treasure; of this, *the man*. The parable of "The Treasure" illustrates the *value* of the kingdom. The parable of "The Merchantman" bids us seek that kingdom and secure it at any cost. "A Man's Religion Worth What It Costs Him," is a title that well expresses the theme of the parable of "The Merchantman." Treat these two parables thus topically, and instead of a useless repetition of one thought, you have two distinct pictures, each conveying a vital lesson for every Christian life.

Not a little valuable truth is lost by the confusion of similar parables. "The Pounds" and "The Talents" are thus frequently confounded. "The Importunate Widow" and "The Friend at Midnight" are made to teach but one lesson. The three parables of Luke 15 are treated as one truth represented in three forms. The topical method of interpretation brings out the distinction between these parables in each group and so makes very clear some lessons that would otherwise be obscured.

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."
The universal love of a story is the magic touch of nature

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that brings together all classes of men, and holds with equal attraction the old and the young, the wise and the unwise, the rich and the poor. Hence the stories or parables of Jesus have been in every age the unfailing source of most popular gospel preaching. When abstract truth palls upon the conscience or fails to reach the understanding, the parable arouses attention, quickens feeling, and spurs to action. There is that in the parable itself which will hold the attention and stir the soul even when the exposition of it is most commonplace. This is no excuse, however, for slovenly work. The rather should we give the parables our best thought and our most earnest study, since they will repay us so richly.

"The parables of the kingdom," says a German writer, "are, as it were, a picture-gallery, and we walk up and down examining each picture by itself. We must not forget, however, that these are heavenly pictures that hang around us, that heavenly things are here exposed to view. A heavenly interpreter walks by our side; we must have a heavenly sense, if we would grasp the meaning of what we hear and see. If our study quickens this sense within us, so that it shall grow clearer and sharper before every picture, a rich treat awaits us; for the heavenly gallery is great."

Jesus' Introduction
to His Parables

CHAPTER I

Jesus' Introduction to His Parables

THE SOWER

Cf. Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 13-20; Luke 8:4-15

Text.—“*Take heed . . . how ye hear!*”—Luke 8:18

ALWAYS read the preface of a book. If the book be a good one, the preface is worth reading. If the book be not good, a glance at the preface may save valuable time by showing its worthlessness in a few moments. In any case the preface will usually furnish the key to the pages that follow; and we read them intelligently if we have read it carefully. Our Lord has given us a preface to his parables, and only those who master the preface can study the volume with profit.

Seated in a boat near the water's edge, with a vast multitude gathered before him on the shore, our Lord uttered that beautiful and instructive series of parables contained in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. He is about to talk of the kingdom of heaven, but he begins with a lesson upon *Hearing*. The other parables of the chapter form a distinct group bound together by a common topic. This parable reveals no vital connection with the group save that of an effective preface. It is a challenge of attention, and as such forms a fitting introduction to the entire collection of parables. As such let us study it carefully.

We call our parable “The Parable of the Sower,” because it is so named by the Master himself from its opening words. Named from its subject, it would be “*The Parable of the Soil.*” This title would call atten-

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tion directly to its central thought. So far as the story is concerned, the sower and the seed are mere adjuncts of the field. They were made for the soil, not the soil for them. The artist who attempts to represent this parable by a picture in which the principal figure is that of a man sowing seed, plainly misinterprets the story. *The soil* is the object of chief importance and emphasis—the soil and its influence upon the harvest. The four-fold division represents but one truth, viz., *Other things being equal, the growth and fruitfulness of seeds will be determined by the nature of the soil upon which they are cast.*

This is a simple law of nature which holds good always and everywhere; and it illustrates a higher and more important law of human life. Nay, rather, it is identical with that higher law; for law is one in all spheres. Expressing the law in terms of the spiritual life we say, *The effect of truth upon the life is determined by the condition of the heart into which it falls.*

In other words, the character of the hearer and his state of mind determine the results of his hearing. What a man receives from any truth that he hears or reads depends upon what he brings to that truth. What we receive from the gospel itself depends upon what we bring to the gospel.

The parable addresses us as hearers—hearers of the gospel, and it addresses all. It is not a parable for one class as distinguished from others. Jesus did not divide his audience into sections, after the manner of the modern political orator, and address each class separately. We cannot say that one lesson is for the pulpit and another for the pew, one for the saint and another for the sinner. Every Christian is both a hearer and a preacher of the gospel. We are all saints to the very limited measure of our spiritual attainments; and we are all sinners to the very large measure of our shortcomings. Each of us, therefore, may receive the whole

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gospel for himself, and may look for its application to his own life. I repeat, then: The parable addresses all of us in our capacity of hearers of the gospel. And there is no one so wise, no saint so perfect in sainthood, that he has outgrown the necessity of hearing the word of God. Again and again the truth has been presented to us, till we sometimes fancy that we know it by heart and have exhausted its meaning. We wonder if there can be any profit in listening any longer. Still there comes to us this warning, "Take heed therefore how ye hear"!

Has some truth fallen on your ears hundreds of times? You may hear it hundreds of times more, and it may bear new fruit each time if you hear it aright. The great need of the world is not so much new truth as a new hearing of old truth that shall make it more fruitful. You say you have heard the gospel till you know it by heart. Very good. But has the gospel become so thoroughly written into your life that everybody can read it there? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." Are all these fruits fully matured and ripened in your character? If not, you have need to hear the same old truth many times more; for they spring from no other seed than the gospel that you have heard from childhood, falling into a heart ready to receive it. Even this most familiar of all parables may bring a fresh blessing to him who comes to it with fresh interest and desire.

Having read the parable, let us question it.

What of the person and character of the sower? Nothing. What of the quality and nature of the seed? Again, nothing. In their place these are most important matters. But they are out of place when we are considering our duties as hearers. We are concerned with the message, not with the messenger. And in dealing with the message, our duty is not to question its truthfulness, but to get the truth out of it; not to measure its

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value in the abstract, but to get as much concrete value out of it as we can. The Pharisees were so disturbed about the "authority" of Jesus, the messenger, that they lost the good they might have received from his messages. A great deal of truth becomes fruitless for us because we are prejudiced against him who utters it, or because we do not like the form in which it comes to us. There is wisdom in the advice of an old Scotch preacher, "Be willing to receive truth even from the devil, if he chances to utter any." If our lives are to be fruitful we must receive all truth without prejudice and without criticism.

The falling of the seed on all kinds of soil is taken for granted. In no case is lack of fruitage attributed to want of seed. The seed was abundant and good. So in all our lives. If you and I fall short of the true standard of character, if we fail to manifest the Christian graces, if our lives are not fruitful in the largest and best sense, it is never from a lack of truth. However limited our opportunities may be, however imperfect the presentations of truth to which we listen, truth enough has fallen upon every soul to make it noble and saintly and grand if only the truth were rightly received and obeyed. More than this: the seed scattered from the hand of a thoughtless child will grow as readily and will produce as much fruit as the seed sown by an experienced farmer. So the truth that we receive from the most unskilful and ignorant of teachers may prove unexpectedly precious and helpful to our lives.

When we Christians go away from God's house complaining, as we so often do, that we have received no benefit from our worship, that the message has been without value to us, might it not be well to ask ourselves whether the fault was wholly with the messenger and his message, or whether it was with our own hearts and with the manner and spirit of our hearing. It is said that a French cook will make an appetizing and nourishing

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meal from scraps of food that others would throw away as useless. Not less true is it that a really earnest hearer will find a blessing in a service that fills less earnest hearts with contempt or excites in them a sense of ridicule.

How large a proportion of even Christian people come to the services of God's house with their minds wholly fixed on what they shall see and hear, utterly forgetful of their own condition and fitness to receive! In fact, if they think about it at all, they expect first to be brought into a receptive mood and then to be filled. Is it any wonder that they go away many times unsatisfied? Any wonder that the word to which they listen brings forth no fruit in their lives? If, instead of this, all came to the sanctuary with an earnest purpose and a definite desire, if every heart were open and every ear attentive, if upon every lip were a prayer for the teaching of God's Spirit, the preaching of the gospel would be vastly more fruitful than it is. No soul was ever yet lost for want of truth. No life was ever left barren because it lacked the good seed. No; if souls are lost, if lives are fruitless, it is because they have not received the truth that has been offered them and made the most of it.

The seed being abundant and good, the soil determines its fruitfulness. Even so the heart of the hearer determines the value of the truth heard. Four kinds of soil catch the seed as it falls from the hand of the sower. Four diverse conditions of mind and heart must be reckoned with in estimating the effect of truth. Hence we have four lines of illustration which converge upon the single thought, the paramount importance of hearing aright.

(a) "Some seeds fell by the way side." The ground is hard trodden by much passing, and they do not sink into it. They merely lie upon the surface to be picked up by the birds.

There is the wayside mind. It "heareth the word of

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the kingdom, and understandeth it not." The truth falls upon the surface merely. It finds no lodgment. A child listens to a lecture by some profound scientist, and how much does he get from it? Nothing at all. He hears the words, but they are meaningless to him. They fall upon his ear and are quickly forgotten. Or one who has no musical training or taste hears a grand oratorio, but its grandeur fails to impress him. He does not comprehend it. The music falls on the outside of him, as it were; it finds no entrance into his soul.

"Understandeth it not." Whose fault is it? Are we responsible for our failure to understand truth? In many cases we are; for our failure frequently results from inattention, unwillingness, want of candor, rather than from any real incapacity. We hear one thing while we are thinking of another. We are not ready to yield our lives to the leadings of the truth. We are prejudiced against the speaker or the message or both and do not give the truth fair consideration.

The path was not always hard; remember that. Once it was mellow like the rest of the field, but it has been trodden hard by much travel. Hearts are hardened by repeatedly hearing and not doing the truth. Says Ruskin, "Every duty we omit obscures some truth we might have known." This is what is meant by being "gospel-hardened."

All gospel truth is practical. God does not propound to men certain theories to be discussed, certain principles to be admired, certain abstract propositions to be received and revolved in the mind like so many theorems in geometry or arguments in mental philosophy. His word is not designed simply to instruct or interest or amuse, but to affect the life, to produce a radical change of motive and conduct. It reveals duties to be done, commands to be obeyed, promises to be accepted and fulfilled. And the value of that word to each one lies in its direct and practical application to the in-

dividual life. If we continually hear such truth without putting it into practise, we grow indifferent alike to command and promise, conscience loses its keenness, and our moral and spiritual development is retarded. The truth we ought to understand without difficulty becomes meaningless to us. It falls on our ears, but finds no lodgment in our hearts and bears no fruit in our characters. Is not this the supreme peril of the twentieth century churchgoer?

(b) "Others fell upon the rocky places." The thin layer of earth upon some broad ledge is soft and warm and the seed quickly springs up and as quickly withers. Such are we when we keep our minds open and attentive, but our hearts hard closed beneath. It is one thing to receive truth with the mind, quite another to receive it with the heart. It is one thing to be orthodox, another thing to be holy. And the fruit of truth is holiness.

Any intelligent mind must receive truth with joy. Even the criminal can admire lofty ideals and pure motives. One cannot hear and understand the gospel without approving it. Yet how many persons imagine that there is something meritorious in the mere intellectual assent to truth! How many expect to be admitted to heaven on the ground of the truth they have known and admired, though they never practised it!

Now, truth to be fruitful must sink deeper than the mind. It must become rooted in the soul. It must strike deep down into the heart. Truth received in the mind springs up. There is a larger intelligence, a greater breadth of thought. The outward appearance of the life is more pleasing for having thus received the truth. But when that truth comes in contact with daily duty, when it threatens to cross selfish pleasure, when it stands between us and success, when it calls for some unwelcome service, then we too often repudiate its claim. It is easy to be a Christian in theory, to accept God's truth

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into our minds, to discuss lofty themes, to admire perfect ideals, to extol saintly character. But to let that truth into our hearts, to take the perfect ideals as our standard of daily life, to square all our conduct by them, to strive for the attainment of saintly character in ourselves—that is not so easy. Yet until we do this, the truth we hear is fruitless and without value for us. “The important question regarding every man is not, How much truth does he put into his creed? but, How much truth does he put into his life?”

(4)

(c) “Others fell upon the thorns.” There may be good soil, but it is preoccupied. The seed is choked and dies. That is your case, it is mine, when we allow the cares of the world and the eager pursuit of riches to crowd God’s truth from our minds and hearts. The conventional interpretation of covetousness and worldly anxiety comes at once to every mind. There is, however, another interpretation, less obvious perhaps, but not less important.

“Thorns” stand for any kind of weed that chokes out the desired crop. Corn is a weed if it grows in a wheat-field. The blackberry is only a troublesome thorn if it springs up in the midst of a flower bed. So the most innocent occupations and even praiseworthy actions may become harmful if allowed to crowd vital truth from our lives.

To be diligent in business is commendable in general. But when we become so completely absorbed in business that we can think of nothing else or do nothing else, when we permit the cares and plans of the week-day to invade the hallowed Sabbath, when our minds are so fully occupied with our toil that we cannot attend to God’s truth, then our very diligence becomes a vice. Many pleasures, too, are innocent till they interfere with duty and hinder our obedience to higher truth; then they are no longer innocent; they are thorns and weeds. The very forms and services of religion, if they keep

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us back from the performance of less congenial duty, may become thorns. We really have less to fear in these days from the positively evil than from the multitude of good things that overcrowd our lives. As President Hyde has said, "The worst enemy of the best is the good." The old proverb, "Of two evils choose the less," is out of date. To-day the exhortation must run, "Of two good things always choose the better." Whatever it is that comes into the mind or heart and prevents us from hearing and obeying the voice of duty, is a thorn.

Each human life is a field of limited area. No one life can contain everything. Among many good things we must be continually choosing the best. We must ask concerning every claim that is presented to us, not merely, "Is this good in itself?" but, "Is this the very best thing to which I can give my life just now?" We must choose between pleasure and profit, even when the pleasure is the best and most innocent. We must choose between indulgence and service. We must choose between inclination and duty. In short, we must be ever ready to put aside from our lives the most pleasing and harmless occupations to make way for the reception and growth of highest truth. The fruit of to-day will become the thorns of to-morrow, if we do not constantly make room for the sowing and fruitage of better seed.

(d) "Others fell upon the good ground." There are good hearers of truth. Their minds are attentive. Their hearts are open. The word sinks deep. It lays hold of the very springs of life and action. And so the truth becomes fruitful in transformed life and exalted character, in Christian graces, in noble service.

Who are the good ground hearers? All may be such who will. The possibilities of change in the soil are limited. Not so is it with human hearts. We may make ourselves what we choose in this matter. As careless hearing hardens the heart, thoughtful hearing softens it and fits it for fruit-bearing.

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Three qualities characterize the good hearer. They are: 1, attention; 2, sincerity; 3, obedience.

First, attention. I believe it is Lowell who says, "Attention is the stuff that memory is made of; and memory is accumulated genius." We may go farther and say that the memory of divine truth is accumulated blessing. The habit of attention, which lies back of all, may be cultivated.

Second, sincerity. If attention is to be of value it must be supplemented by sincerity. The truth must be received into "an honest and good heart." Personal feeling, prejudice, self-interest, must not distort its application nor cause its purpose to miscarry.

Third, obedience. This is most important of all. The truth must be obeyed. It is truth obeyed that transforms the life, that redeems the world. It is not the preaching of the gospel, nor the hearing of the gospel, but the practise of the gospel, that blesses mankind. The great need of the world to-day as always is the need of *applied* Christianity, of the gospel revealing itself in our daily life and in all the relations of mankind.

Attention, sincerity, obedience, these are all voluntary attitudes of the intelligent mind. They are conditions for the fulfilment of which every individual is directly responsible. To hear aright is a universal privilege, a universal duty.

The result of right hearing is assured. "It brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold." What is the fruit of truth? Knowledge? culture? enlightenment? No. These accompany the fruit. They lend beauty and attractiveness to the growing plant, but, after all, they are only the leaves. The fruit is character. The truth that informs but does not transform is of little value. The truth that works upon the mind alone, while it fails to reach the heart and life, has not accomplished its mission.

Some of the most godless characters of history have been men and women who prided themselves in their knowledge and appreciation of divine truth. Like the Pharisees of old, they had received it into their minds, but it had exerted no influence upon their lives. And many of those who to-day block the wheels of human progress and hinder the redemption of society are men whose lives are beautiful with the foliage of Christian enlightenment—refined, educated, polite, pious—but who are wholly wanting in the spirit of brotherly love and self-sacrifice.

Now let us glance once more at the parable. We have dissected it; let us gather its parts together again. Let us think of it for a moment as a complete unit, a living organism.

Do we not almost invariably think of this picture as representing four distinct persons or classes of persons? And does it not follow in our thinking that only one section of the parable can possibly apply to ourselves? And so we throw away three-fourths of it as having nothing for us. Fortunate if we keep even one-fourth!

Ah! take heed how ye hear! The whole parable was spoken for you. It represents four possible conditions of your mind and heart. Hence every part of it speaks directly to your soul.

Who is the wayside hearer? Thou art the man. Have you never lost truth through inattention, or unwillingness, or want of obedience?

Who is the rocky ground hearer? Thou art the man. Your grasp of truth is sometimes shallow. You receive truth many times into your mind to which you do not open your heart.

Who is represented by the thorny ground? Thou art the man. Is not your life oftentimes preoccupied with other things, so that the truth you hear is choked before it comes to fruitage? Do you never allow business, or study or pleasure or politics to fill the place in your

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heart that ought to be kept clear for the cultivation of character and the direct service of God?

Who receives seed in the good ground? Again, thou art the man, if thou dost choose. For such receiving is in the power of every hearer. You can attend. You can treat the truth with candor. You can obey it. And so you can make it fruitful in your life.

Seeds of truth fall daily upon every life. In them lie the germs of character. Their legitimate fruit is ennobled manhood and womanhood. All the graces and attributes of perfect humanity must spring from them. These cannot be found elsewhere. If you and I fall below the true standard, it is not for want of truth, but because we do not hear the truth aright.

On every hand is the voice of God, yet we often complain that we do not hear it. We excuse our small attainments on the ground of lack of privilege. But how many saints have developed the fruits of the Spirit from a much more scanty sowing! Jacob heard the voice of God in a dream, and he became the noblest character of his age. David heard the voice of God amid the din of war and the roaring of the storm, and the portrait of his sainthood is given us in the Psalms. Elijah heard the voice of God in the quiet whisperings of conscience, and it brought forth the fruit of immortal heroism. Saul of Tarsus heard the voice of God in the thunder and was transformed from a persecuting Pharisee into a Christian saint. Martin Luther heard the voice of God in a flash of memory, and it was the turning-point in his career and character.

The same voice speaks to you. Have not you and I more and higher truth revealed to us than any of these enjoyed? If, then, we fall short of their attainments, who is responsible for our fruitlessness? The seed is abundant and good. The soil, *the soil*, the trouble is with that. *Take heed how ye hear!*

The Vitality of Character

CHAPTER II

The Vitality of Character

THE GROWING SEED

Mark 4:26-29

Text. — "*The earth beareth fruit of herself.*" — Mark 4:28

OUR life is twofold. It is made up of elements human and divine. These must work together for all really valuable results. Hence the gospel is twofold in its appeal. Its truth adapts itself to both sides of our dual nature. Its teaching recognizes the necessary harmony and interplay of the two elements in the attainment of the perfect life.

The Christian life, then, is a composite result of human and divine forces working together. This fact it is which gave birth to the parable of "The Growing Seed," as a companion piece to the parable of "The Sower."

The parable of "The Sower" unfolds the truth as it applies to the human side of life, i. e., to duty. "The preparations of the heart belong to man." Repentance, conversion, concentrated activity; these are our part in the work of salvation. These are things which we must do and which God cannot do for us. We are directly and solely responsible for hearing truth aright and acting upon it. On the other hand, the salvation which results from these is the gift of God. Regeneration, sanctification, growth in grace; these are wholly of

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God. They are the response of divine love to our human obedience and desire. The results which the gospel seeks are stupendous; yet the duties which it lays upon men are simple and easy of accomplishment. Attention, obedience, service, devotion on our part, and then a quiet trusting in God for the rest. "Follow me"; that is the challenge of human obedience. "I will make you fishers of men" (or whatsoever else you ought to be); that is the promise of divine assistance; commonplace acts of duty by the disciple; miracles of power and achievement by the Master.

The parable of "The Sower" is preliminary. This parable introduces us directly to the central theme of Jesus' teaching—"The Kingdom of God" or "The Kingdom of Heaven."

Pardon a brief definition, since this is the common theme of a large number of parables, and our interpretation of the entire group depends on our understanding of this phrase. What does Jesus mean when he uses the phrase "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven"? Does he refer to the Christian Church, which was so soon to be organized? Clearly not; for the Church is an external organization, whereas he says, "The kingdom of God is within you." Does he then look forward to the conditions of a future life in another world? No; for that would imply a perfect order of things, and the parable of "The Tares among the Wheat" proclaims the imperfect conditions of earth.

We shall look far before we find a better definition than that given by St. Paul, "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." In a word, the kingdom of God is *character*, godly character revealing itself in every relation of earth, godly character incarnate in human lives and becoming more and more widely incarnate in universal humanity. The kingdom of God is within you; it is within all men to the extent of the common development of

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the godly character. Its consummation is a redeemed world "wherein dwelleth righteousness," a race in which the divine character is perfectly restored.

This definition calls for neither argument nor expansion. It claims no other authority than its self-evident truthfulness. It is sufficient to test it by its adaptability to the conditions of each of the succeeding parables.

Starting from this definition we see in the parable before us a picture of *The Vitality of Godly Character*. It unfolds the principles of spiritual growth, the mode of spiritual attainment. And this is what it tells us: godly character is not a mechanical production; it is a manifestation of life. It cannot be fashioned by human hands, it cannot be created by human ingenuity or effort, but is the immediate product of the divine efficiency. There are certain things which we can do and which we must do in connection with the process. We must keep our hearts continually open to the influence of truth and must scatter truth diligently upon other hearts. We must keep the spiritual soil in good condition and court the sunshine of God's presence and the showers of his blessing. But when this has been done diligently and faithfully we must leave the results with him, assured that in due time we shall reap as we have sown. Every growing plant of the summer time is a silent witness to the power and willingness of God to carry on these marvelous vital processes if we but make the simple adjustments of nature which are within our reach.

So much for the general sweep of the parable. Now, what of its particular teaching? What do we find as we note its consecutive details? At least four distinct thoughts discover themselves to our search. They are these:

(a) *The vital process is slow.* It is a gradual process. He "should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow."

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(b) *The vital process is secret.* It is enshrouded in mystery. It should "grow, he knoweth not how."

(c) *The vital process is spontaneous.* It is not something done from without, but is the direct product of an indwelling force. "The earth beareth fruit of herself."

(d) *The vital process is sure.* It is the fulfilment of a regular and eternal law. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

First, I say, the parable suggests *the slowness of the vital process*. The development of life is always gradual and imperceptible. We sometimes say of a plant that we can see it grow; but that is mere hyperbole. The seed is sown, and for days it lies hidden in the ground. It is moistened by showers and warmed by the sun, and, at length, a tiny shoot appears. In course of time we shall see a full-grown plant and ripened ears of grain. Yet we can scarcely say how or when this great change has taken place. As we have watched it from day to day we have observed no sudden or marked transitions. There has been no perceptible movement. The expansion has not been discernible by human eyes. The plant seems no larger to-day than yesterday. But when we note the growth of weeks or months we see a gradual progress through all the stages of advancing maturity.

Slow and gradual also is the growth of character; for character is a living thing; it is a spiritual organism. There is no instantaneous perfection. The Scriptures do not reveal any short cut to mature sainthood. If they did so we should doubt their truthfulness and value. We must grow in spiritual experience and knowledge and power as we grow in physical stature and strength, as the plant grows from its seed—by a process so gradual that its working eludes observation, but so real and so constant that its stages are manifest to all. Doubtless there will be periods of unusually rapid soul growth, periods when we are conscious of making great progress

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in the divine life, just as boys and girls grow much faster at one time than at another, or as plants develop with redoubled quickness under the influence of the early summer rains. Yet, after all, spiritual growth must be step by step through all the regular gradations of experience, which are in essence the same for all disciples. We must add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and so on to the end of the catalogue. We can neither omit any stage of the vital process nor slight any experience that comes to us in the way. And we must remember that even the time element is essential to perfect maturity.

We are often impatient at this gradual process. We wish to attain to the fulness of the stature of Christ at a bound, to enjoy the fruits of victory without first enduring the hardships of the protracted struggle. We wish, in other words, to reap the full corn within a few days or even a few hours of the seed-sowing. Could anything be more absurd or unreasonable? An Oriental juggler will plant a seed in the earth in the presence of an audience and will apparently cause it to sprout and a plant to grow up and mature in a few minutes; but everybody knows that it is mere jugglery, that there has been no real growth there. How does he accomplish the feat? That I cannot answer. I only know that there is some deception about it. He never performs the feat in his garden, but only on the stage.

So any fancied spiritual growth that occurs in a few moments is a deception. The doctrine of instantaneous perfection is spiritual jugglery. Conversion is instantaneous, never otherwise. Sanctification may be instantaneous; I will not dogmatize about that. But development, growth—that is always gradual.

Character, as the product of growth, is of slow attainment. It demands a lifetime for its ripening. Our noblest characters have been the fruitage of many generations of consecration and earnest aspiration. Oliver

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Wendell Holmes' advice has passed into a proverb, "Begin the training of a child a hundred years before he is born!" Heredity is an important factor in the formation of character. But since we must begin with that, whether good or bad, we are chiefly concerned with the years between birth and death, and they all count. Jesus' ideal is that gradual but steady development of spiritual power and grace, that daily expansion of soul, that reveals itself to the world in added virtues and increasing usefulness. Such growth, though at times it may try the patience and test the courage of the disciple, will be permanent and abundantly fruitful.

In the second place, our parable suggests the truth that *the vital process is secret or mysterious*. Watch it closely as we will, it eludes our investigation. We cannot understand it. In its simplest manifestations it infinitely transcends the most profound work of man. Here, for example, is a magnificent temple in process of erection. We both see and understand the method of work by which its massive towers and arched roof are brought to gradual completion. Or, here again is a delicately constructed watch whose hands move so slowly as they mark off the hours that we cannot see their motion; yet we can trace that motion backward through systems of wheels till it becomes quite perceptible and its rate easily calculated. That is dead mechanics. But the growth, the vital development of the most commonplace weed is utterly beyond our ken. In it is bound up the very knowledge of God himself. As the seer has said:

"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower;—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is."

That the flower *grows* we can easily demonstrate by successive measurements. *How* it grows we cannot dis-

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cover by the most persistent investigation. In fact, too curious and frequent examination may stop the process by destroying the vital principle.

So of character. Its growth is secret, mysterious, and by no care or wisdom of ours to be understood or explained. The very effort is suicidal. Whoever keeps his eyes turned in upon his own soul that he may discover the secret and rate of its growth will surely paralyze his spiritual life. He will inevitably become selfish, morbid, and wholly unspiritual.

Religious teachers of the past enjoined frequent and exhaustive self-examination as a means of attaining perfect sainthood. Result—a mechanical and Christless Phariseism in place of living and growing spirituality. One intelligent glance at the open page of nature would have sufficed to convince them of their mistake. Growth is mysterious. What you see is not growth; it cannot be. Whoever fancies himself conscious of daily spiritual growth is self-deceived. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." Self-contemplation hinders growth; virtue stagnates with introspection.

Says Carlyle: "If in any sphere of man's life, then in the moral sphere, as in the inmost and most vital of all, it is good that there be wholeness; that there be unconsciousness which is the evidence of this. Let the free, reasonable will which dwells in us, as in our Holy of Holies, be indeed free, and obeyed like a divinity, as is its right and its effort; the perfect obedience will be the silent one."

The most infallible token of healthy spiritual growth is entire unconsciousness of growth, entire forgetfulness of all selfward interests, even the highest, in the eagerness of service and devotion to the will of God. Every blade of grass, every spear of wheat, every stalk of corn, is a miracle of divine power whose secret working we have not begun to fathom. Is not a redeemed and perfected character an unspeakably greater miracle? And

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shall we try to understand the greater while we are ignorant of the less?

Again, we are reminded by our parable that *the vital process is spontaneous*. That is to say, it is the natural and inevitable result of the working of vital force. It is the necessary expression of vitality. The seed grows of itself, we say. No direct effort of man can accomplish the process. We can only affect it indirectly by surrounding the seed with circumstances which shall be favorable or unfavorable to the operation of these inherent vital forces. We can clear away obstacles and leave the forces free for best action or we can clog and hamper them.

Professor Drummond has made this point very clear. "A boy grows," he says, "without trying. One or two simple conditions are fulfilled and the growth goes on. He thinks probably as little about the conditions as about the result; he fulfils the conditions by habit, the result follows by nature. Both processes go on steadily from year to year apart from himself and all but in spite of himself. One would never think of telling a boy to grow. A doctor has no prescription for growth. He can tell me how growth may be stunted or impaired, but the process itself is recognized as beyond control—one of the few, and therefore very significant, things which nature keeps in her own hands. No physician of souls in like manner has any prescription for spiritual growth. It is a question he is most often asked and most often answers wrongly. He may prescribe more earnestness, more prayer, more self-denial, or more Christian work. These are prescriptions for something, but not for growth. . . . Manuals for devotion, with complicated rules for getting on in the Christian life, would do well sometimes to return to the simplicity of nature; and earnest souls who are attempting sanctification by struggle instead of sanctification by faith might be spared much humiliation by learning the botany of Jesus. There can

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be no other principle of growth than this. It is a vital fact. And to try to *make* a thing grow is as absurd as to help the tide to come in or the sun to rise."

Goethe has summed up the same thought in one pregnant sentence, "While one strives, he errs."

The fruits of the Spirit are not the lifeless products of the sculptor's chisel or the triumphs of the artist's skill. They are living things, graces which have grown from the seed of truth by means of the vital force hidden within it. They are the manifestations of divine power working in and through the human soul for its perfection and eternal progress. They constitute what Matthew Arnold calls, "The eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness."

Finally, our parable illustrates the fact that *the vital process is sure*. It is the result of a fixed, divine law. There is no chance or caprice in nature. Still less is there any failure. Everything follows a regular and clearly defined order. The sequence of cause and effect is certain. To obtain desired results the observed conditions must be fulfilled. When we have made the proper adjustments of cause, we may depend upon the unvarying action of divine power to produce unvarying results. Mysterious and spontaneous most certainly growth is, but capricious or uncertain never. It is as changeless as the God on whose power it depends.

Nor is it otherwise in the kingdom of God. We talk about revivals and baptisms of the Spirit, which are but two phases in the growth of godlike character, as though they were matters of uncertainty or chance. We lament our own unspirituality or excuse the slow growth of the kingdom in the world about us in terms which imply a degree of capriciousness in the working of divine power. We think of God's Spirit as flitting about like a butterfly, lighting now here and now there, and bringing to this soul or that community a wonderful uplift from without. Such notions are ruinous to spiritual de-

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velopment either in the soul or in the community. What is the Holy Spirit but this vital element, this Power of God actually resident in every soul, in every community, and ever waiting for the favorable conditions to manifest himself in the growth of Christian character! God works according to fixed laws in the redemption of men. There is no more uncertainty in the spiritual realm than in the material. We may obtain heavenly harvests as surely and as regularly as the earthly, if we are as diligent and as wise in sowing the seed and cultivating the soil. The "Reign of Law" is an accepted postulate of all physical science. When its application to the spiritual life is commonly recognized, when the spiritual husbandman uses the same common sense in his work that is required for ordinary farming, then the kingdom of God will have entered upon a new era of progress.

Slow, secret, spontaneous, sure—these are the tokens of growth in Christian character which indicate its vitality. It is this element of vitality that sharply distinguishes between Christian character and all its counterfeits. This it is which differentiates between spirituality and morality. By a process of self-restraint and resolution we can build up a morality that may resemble some noble temple in its beauty and grandeur; but it will be, after all, a lifeless thing, mechanical, limited, incomplete. The true Christly character, on the other hand, is the manifestation of the divine life in the soul, at first insignificant, but daily growing and developing, capable of limitless expansion, having endless possibilities of progress.

No mere philosopher is Jesus, painting ideals of life and character to be wrought out by human wisdom and human power. Rather is he the incarnation and revealer of that divine force which alone can produce true and holy character. Simple indeed is his statement of human duty. Attention, trust, obedience—these are all

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that he requires; but, as a result of these, wrought out through the direct efficiency of divine power, a complete transformation of character, social and individual, is acquired. If the former parable may be summed up in the words, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," this adds the words, "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."

The Conservation of Character

CHAPTER III

The Conservation of Character

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

Text.—“*Let both grow together until the harvest.*”—Matt. 13:30

THE ideal of character is pure virtue. The ideal of society is universal righteousness. The ideal of religion is good unmixed with ill. But where, among men, can these be found? Utopia exists only in the poetic imagination. The perfect society is a dream yet unrealized. The practical experience of every-day life on earth always reveals the evil in closest fellowship with the good. As we never find pure gold in masses, but in minutest grains mingled with sand or scattered through the worthless rock, and as the wheat comes to us encased in chaff, so your saint generally betrays some very unsaintly traits, your church has its faithless disciples, your society has its incorrigibles, your family has its “black sheep.” In short, wherever the Son of man sows the good seed of righteousness, the devil is pretty sure to get in some tares of evil. Even among our Lord’s apostles one was a Judas.

No picture, therefore, in all that lakeside panorama, is more familiar, none more painfully true to the common experience than this: “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares

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also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also."

To every soul this world is at first a repository of good seed. The sowing of the Son of man is abundant on every hand. For a time we are unconscious of anything else. The child mind with its innocent superficialness sees in everything and everybody the expression of truth and purity, the inspiration to new gladness. But with growing intelligence and deepening insight there comes a sad experience of disillusion. At some time or other much that was hitherto supposed to be good wheat proves to be worthless tares. Unexpected conditions reveal themselves, and the theory of life must be readjusted to meet them.

Evil exists. Try as we may, we cannot long delude ourselves with the notion that evil is either unreal or good. While we sleep it may be unobserved; but when we awake it confronts us and we must reckon with it. More and more clearly the fact forces itself upon us as we grow in intelligence and moral character. No good can be attempted anywhere, much less achieved without conflict with evil.

We find the evil first in our own hearts. The effort to build up personal character is a lifelong struggle with evil passions, desires, habits. What disciple of experience and thoughtfulness has not often been impelled to confess with Paul, "The good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise." "When I would do good, evil is present with me"! The new-born soul may expect, frequently does expect, that regeneration will bring immediate and permanent release from all temptation, that in one brief moment all traces of evil will be eradicated from his heart never again to assert themselves. But after the first emotional ecstasy is past he learns that what he mistook for the note of victory was really the trumpet-

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call to battle. Enlistment is but a prelude to the drill of the camps and the toil of the march and the field. Only he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

And when we turn our eyes away from self, and look on the world round about us, do we not meet with a similar experience? Who that has ever tried to scatter the seeds of righteousness, to build up the kingdom of God among men, has not met opposing forces at every turn? Did the power of the Holy Spirit ever begin to manifest itself in a church or a community but the devil at once redoubled his activity? A revival of religion always means a counter revival of wickedness. No effort of good, however self-evident and disinterested, but will arouse opposition and meet with misrepresentation. It exactly accords with observed laws that the period of Jesus' ministry on earth should also be a period of unusual Satanic activity, a period when men, more than ever before or since, were "possessed with devils."

But the fact that evil exists needs no emphasis. It obtrudes itself whether we will or no. We at once ask, Whence does it come? And what shall we do with it? The servants of the householder came and said unto him: "Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares?" This is always the first question; yet it is a question of comparatively slight importance. It is therefore answered briefly. "An enemy hath done this." Even the further explanation, "The enemy that sowed them is the devil," does not add much to our knowledge of the subject.

We waste a great deal of time and strength in searching for an answer to the question, "Whence then hath it tares?" A child displays some unlovely trait, and, instead of giving our undivided attention to the work of correcting the evil, we begin to ask, "From whom does he take it?" Or we ourselves yield to some evil propensity, and we immediately trace the stream of evil

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tendency to a remote ancestor on whose shoulders we lay all the blame for our wrong doing or wrong wishing. Now the study of heredity is doubtless of great value in its proper place; but it is out of place in the presence of manifest evil. There the first and chief thought should be of cure. It may be interesting from a scientific standpoint to know that this habit was inherited from one's grandfather and that unchristly spirit from a long forgotten great-aunt; but is it not unspeakably more important to know how the bad habit may be cured or the evil spirit exorcised? There is a lot of sheer pedantry in the modern discussion of heredity. Worse than that, it is made the scapegoat for all manner of shortcomings and iniquities. Because of it parents excuse the inexcusable faults of their children and their own indolent neglect to correct those faults. Because of it the categorical imperative of righteousness is often exchanged for the weak-kneed interrogative of unmanliness and sin.

Of much greater practical value, therefore, is the second question of the laborers, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" In other words, What shall we do with the evil now that we have discovered it? How shall we remove it? This is the question around which the parable clusters. It is the question about which the mind of all humanity is agitated to-day. And the story of The Tares and the Wheat embodies our Lord's answer to every questioning mind.

The Conservation of Christly Character—that is the topic suggested. Evil springs up everywhere in closest contact with the good. It touches the good on all sides. It crowds upon it, is intermingled with it, counterfeits it, threatens it. How shall the good be saved from contamination? How shall its best development be secured?

The proposal of the servants illustrates the purely human method of dealing with the question. "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" Shall we turn

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from the wheat to the tares? Shall we cease to think about and cultivate the good, and concentrate our force and our attention upon the evil? This is, I say, the universal human method. Our first impulse in this work is always negative, to root up, to destroy.

Take the matter of individual character. A soul awakens to the consciousness of its divine nature, of its spiritual possibilities. Aspirations towards the Christ-life are kindled. But there are unchristly habits and tempers. What shall be done with these? "Root them up," "Cast them out," says the teacher of moral philosophy; and often he does this in the name of the gospel. Straightway the evils are made the object of a vigorous attack. At the beginning of a new year or on some special anniversary, strong resolutions are made never again to yield to the temper or indulge the evil habit. Sometimes these resolutions are buttressed with vows and pledges of the most solemn kind. Yet in most cases they are broken as soon as made. And when kept, it is often at the expense of moral strength and effort that might have been used to much better advantage in the direct service of the Lord.

Salvation by resolution is always a disastrous failure. How many there are who, having struggled earnestly against some evil habit and been defeated, have become discouraged, and the very aspirations towards righteousness that had begun to form themselves in the soul have been upturned and destroyed! How many, too, of stronger will have conquered in the fight, but have so exhausted their time and strength in the warfare that they have accomplished nothing else! They have won the victory, it is true, but it has been an empty triumph. It has brought them no return adequate to the outlay. Such a life is like a garden in which the gardener has so busied himself with keeping out the weeds that he has had no time to raise any fruit. It is like a fortress

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so careful for its own defense that it affords no protection to the surrounding country.

Again, take the phrase "kingdom of heaven" in its larger sense—the kingdom in the world, the Christly character in the race. How have men sought to develop that? Before the advent of Jesus but one method was known. The Hebrews waged a war of extermination against the ungodly inhabitants of Canaan. Had their power increased and the national growth made it possible, the same policy would have been carried the world over. The Hebrews were only following more earnestly and consistently than others the universal ideal. What they did the Mohammedan has done since, is doing to-day, so far as he is able. And the Christian Church has often tried to do the same, notwithstanding the plain teachings of Jesus.

The history of the Church has been chiefly a history of repeated conflicts with heresy and sin. It has been a continuous effort to save the world by rooting out evil. Just as soon as the Church escaped the severity of Jewish and heathen persecutions, she became in her turn the persecutor of those who did not conform to her ideals of truth and life. When the age of persecution passed, there came the age of controversy and argument. And to-day many an earnest disciple wastes his power in arguing against infidelity or some minor error in religious teaching when he should use it all in preaching a positive gospel of truth and love.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," said a discerning writer. No less true is it that the blood of many who have been persecuted or punished for wrong-doing has been the seed of greater and more persistent evil. The greatest infidel of the last century owed not a little of his reputation and power to the fact that some very respectable Christians tried to root up his teachings by argument.

The devil is never better pleased than when he can

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keep Christians busy with the negative work of trying to root out evil; for he knows that a good deal of real wheat will come up too. The infidel won a great many more disciples after England's great Christian statesman paid him the compliment of a logical duel. Every false teaching gains a larger influence over a certain class of minds by the very attacks made upon it in the supposed interests of truth. Every sermon preached against error is a free advertisement of the error. The voice of universal experience, therefore, confirms the advice of the wise husbandman, "Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them."

The divine method of solving this great question is indicated in the words that follow: "Let both grow together until the harvest." In contrast with the human method which is negative, the divine method is positive. It is not "root up," but "let grow."

In the cultivation of personal character, this means consecration instead of resolution. That is to say, we shall grow in Christliness of spirit and life, not by making ever new and stronger resolutions against our unchristly qualities, but by positively devoting all our powers to the service of the Master, and never stopping to think of the evil at all.

The mind is invaded by evil thoughts; what shall we do about it? Drive them out? Resolve not to admit them any more? No. That were worse than useless. Evil thoughts and feelings the more resolved against become the more deeply entrenched. What, then, shall we do? Let them alone. Pay no attention to them. Fill the mind with good thoughts. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think (think positively and persistently) on these things." If we do this,

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the thoughts of evil will soon cease to trouble us, for they will be crowded out of the mind.

So with speech. We may sometimes accomplish a trifling reform by resolving and vigorously striving against hasty, careless or impure speech; but if we consecrate our tongues to the service of God, speaking always and everywhere for him, the victory is won unconsciously and without a struggle.

Why not follow the same plan with all things that hinder the growth of saintly character? Let every power of body and mind be fully occupied with active service for Christ. Fill time and strength with the good, and the evil will be crowded out. Human life is like a measure of limited capacity, or like a field of limited area. Fill it with activity of one kind and it cannot contain more. Let streams of good thoughts and good deeds flow in on every side, and all evil will of necessity be driven out. But so long as we do not allow the good to flow in, we resolve and fight in vain against the evil.

A well-meaning but idle young fellow often fell into temptation and sin because of his idleness, and as often came to his pastor in deep contrition and asked him to pray with him that he might not fall again. At length the pastor saw the folly of such a course and said in reply to another request of the familiar sort, "Pray for you! What is the use? I have prayed for you again and again and you are no better for it. Go and get a steady job, and then I will pray for you if you need it." The young man followed his pastor's advice and then found that he had no need of his prayers for that particular weakness.

The great diving-bell goes down into the sea, and, although it is open underneath, no water enters. The bell is filled with air, hence no water can enter. The true life is like a diving-bell let down into the sea of temptation and sin. If it be filled with the breath of

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God, crowded with the atmosphere of devotion and loving service, temptation cannot enter. That must remain outside the life, dark but harmless. The empty life, on the other hand, however pure and earnest it may be, invites temptation and offers itself an easy prey to the assaults of sin.

The best way to conquer your vices is to cultivate your virtues. The best way to avoid temptation is to fill your life with active service.

In relation to others, also, our efforts should be positive. The world suffers from negative preaching and from negative striving. There are too many reformers whose only ideal is to root up and tear down. Too many are eager to break the images which others worship while they themselves worship nothing but the breaking. That is their only religion. There are hundreds of men ready to tell their fellows what not to believe for every one who will show them something worth believing. Hundreds are ready to say, "Thou shalt not," for one to say, "Thou shalt." What are skepticism and infidelity but endless negatives? As Christians we need to guard ourselves carefully against copying the methods of our opponents in our effort to overcome them.

"Let both grow together," is the Master's word. What? Shall we let false teaching grow side by side with the true, with never an attempt to refute it? Certainly. Our one duty as disciples of Jesus is to proclaim God's truth and to prove it true by our transformed lives. The world may not discern the difference between true and false teaching at a glance; but the world does know the difference between love and selfishness, between honesty and fraud, between purity and foulness. If we preach and practise a gospel of purity and kindness and helpfulness, we need have little fear of any false teaching that does not show these good fruits.

Any natural interpretation of the parable cannot evade

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its bearing upon the commonly accepted notions of church discipline. True, so prominent an expositor as Arnot says, "The parable condemns persecution, but it seems not to bear upon discipline at all. Arguments against the exclusion of unworthy members, founded on this parable, are nothing else than perversions of Scripture." But it would be difficult to find a more palpable perversion of Scripture than that by which Mr. Arnot himself reaches his conclusion. It is nothing more nor less than a piece of exegetical juggling. Even Dr. Dods is so far influenced by conventional interpretations that he declares, "This parable, it is true, is not a guide for the action of the rulers of the Church towards its members; but, indirectly, a warning against hasty action is given to those in authority." Why this particular exception should be made in the application of the truth here taught does not appear to the common mind. Were it not better to face the universal application of the truth, and to make no exceptions?

True Christianity implies tolerance. It is not, however, a tolerance born of indifference. It is rather the tolerance that grows out of positive activity in right directions. It is the tolerance that comes from being too busy with our own work ever to worry about the work of our neighbors. It is tolerance made necessary by the fact that we are so absorbed in the fulfilment of imperative duty that we have no time nor strength for controversy. To every challenge of untruth or opposition it replies with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

Again, in the matter of modern reforms, do we not too often expend our force in negative effort? Take the temperance work, for example. I sometimes wonder if we are not giving too much time and thought to attacks upon intemperance. By prohibitory and similar methods we endeavor to root up the evil; but do we as eagerly cultivate the positive virtue of temperance? Do we

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think of supplying something that shall displace the evil habit we seek to cure? This evil, like many another, is the outgrowth of certain natural cravings in human life. It may spring from the desire for good fellowship, or from want of occupation, or similar cause. When we have removed temptation we have accomplished but half the work, and that the less important half. There still remains the necessity of filling that part of the life thus left vacant.

There is room for progress in the direction of positive effort. The age to come must be an age of building rather than of tearing down, an age of cultivation and development rather than an age of restriction. Its keynote must be "Thou shalt," instead of "Thou shalt not." We must try to lead men in the development of their best powers and tendencies rather than in the repression of their worst.

Let both grow—and what will be the result? Plainly this, that the wheat will attain its best growth. But what of the tares? "In the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them." Or, as our Lord interprets the picture, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire."

These figures tell us little regarding the method by which the result is to be brought about. That is not the intention. The thought is purposely centered upon one point—*our duty in the matter*. Enough for us to know that it is not our business to root out the evil. Enough for us to turn our whole attention and strength to doing God's work. But the fact is made clear that our effort will not be in vain. Character will be perfected, and evil will at last be removed and destroyed. The good alone is eternal. Righteousness is immortal.

What we call evil has its purpose in the economy of

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God's kingdom. We do not understand it; but we are assured that when its purpose is accomplished the evil will trouble us no longer. Whether by the development of grace even through the discipline of sin the sin itself is gradually crowded out and dies, or whether it is removed by some external divine process at the last, is a matter of least moment. Sufficient to know that if we do the work God gives us to do, we shall at last be free from the presence and power of sin, and shall serve him in the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

The Growth of Character

CHAPTER IV

The Growth of Character

THE MUSTARD SEED

Matt. 13:31, 32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18, 19

Text.—“*Less than all seeds; but . . . greater than the herbs.*”—

Matt. 13:32

IF there is one thing more wonderful about a seed than its vitality, it is its *growth*—the great results that spring from small beginnings. The fact of growth is in and of itself a greater miracle than the method of growth. Hold a tiny acorn in your hand as you stand beside some gigantic oak, and try to imagine that enormous and solid body compressed within the little shell. The mere working of the vital force is marvelous, but the magnitude of its results defies comprehension.

What though the mustard-seed is not literally the least of all known seeds, nor the mustard-plant very great among the trees? There is considerable greatness springing from inconsiderable littleness, and involving a miracle of creation. The want of literal exactness does not destroy the significance of the proverb, nor does it render the spiritual symbolism of the figure any the less striking.

The parable of The Mustard Seed is a picture of *the growth of Christly character*. It represents not the manner nor the precise extent of spiritual growth, but the fact of that growth. It teaches us how great results in the spiritual life, as in the physical or material life,

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spring from sources apparently the most insignificant.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field." In other words, character, even the noblest and most saintly, is insignificant in its beginnings. A kindly word, a repentant thought, a trifling act, unnoticed by the busy world, despised by the self-sufficient, ridiculed by the thoughtless, may contain the spiritual germ. But the Christly character, when it is full grown, is the grandest thing on earth.

Simple enough and most perfectly childlike was the answer of the little boy in the temple, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" But there was the utterance of a conviction, then but dimly understood, from which sprang the divinest character the world has ever seen—a character that justified the phrase, "God manifest in the flesh."

Did it seem a small thing to those rude fishermen of Galilee when the Master said to them one day, "Follow me," and they obeyed? There was little spiritual significance in the act; perhaps nothing intelligently religious so far as the disciples themselves were concerned. Yet from that hour a change began to come over their lives. That act of obedience was the point of departure upon a course of life that ended in a complete moral and spiritual transformation. By it those men were lifted from their obscurity and enthroned among the great ones of earth. Better still, they were led forth from their selfishness, bigotry and narrow-minded littleness, and were made instruments in the salvation of the world. Their horizon of interest and sympathy, which hitherto had been limited to the shores of a small lake, yes, to the planks of their own boat and the cords of their own net, began to extend itself till it included the whole brotherhood of mankind and was coextensive with the known world. Peasants who before this had been mere units in the race of mankind, began to take

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on a marked individuality, and when the character which grew from this seed had attained its maturity, they were written "saints" upon the deathless page of history.

A similar transformation, traceable to a like trifling cause, has taken place in myriads of lives through the succeeding ages. One brief sentence of Scripture meeting the eye of a German monk was the mustard-seed; the character of Martin Luther, the great reformer, was the tree that grew therefrom. A single kind word from an unknown friend, the mustard-seed; the tree, John B. Gough, rescued from a drunkard's grave to become the greatest apostle of temperance in the nineteenth century. Thomas à Kempis' "Imitation of Christ" read in idle moments on shipboard, the mustard-seed; the heart of John Newton, a reckless, immoral young man, an infidel and a slave-trader, the soil into which it fell; the tree, a saintly character that has embodied itself in some of the sweetest hymns of the Church, not to speak of the noble work done as a preacher of the gospel.

How small are the forces that oftentimes determine character! The humble prayer of the publican, "God, be merciful to me a sinner"; the terrified cry of the wicked and superstitious jailer, "What must I do to be saved?"; the question of the stricken persecutor, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"; these seem mere passing incidents, too trifling to result in radical changes of life and spirit. Yet from such small seeds has sprung the true life in many a soul that else had been hopelessly lost and dead. Hidden deep in the heart, its divine energy has at last burst forth into a noble tree with all its beautiful blossoms of hope and its precious fruit of righteousness. As a mere touch of the Saviour's finger brought new life and purity to the flesh that had been foul with disease, so the most trivial contact of a soul with the divine may

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be the beginning of a growth that shall end in the complete spiritual transformation of the subject.

A quiet word, a single line of some familiar hymn, a small act of Christian sympathy—by such trifling things as these has hope been restored, has evil been conquered, have souls been saved. Do the messages of the gospel, "Believe," "Repent," "Obey," "Confess," "Look unto Jesus," "Follow me,"—do these seem wholly inadequate to lift men out of the depths of sin and sorrow and despair? They are but mustard-seeds. Let them be sown in human lives and watered with the dews of the Spirit, and they will surely spring up in noble growths of character. Not a character the world has ever seen but sprang from seed equally small.

Like Naaman of old, many of us are continually looking for "some great thing" that may come into our lives to transfigure and make them saintly, to cleanse away the stains of sin and to impart the love and power of holiness. Let this parable teach us the folly of such expectation. The secret of your salvation and of mine lies not in the opportunity for large achievement or sacrifice, but in the doing of some insignificant duty that presents itself to us. To take a stand among Christians, to unite with Christ's Church, to habitually attend the gathering for prayer, to do a kind deed in the name of the Master, to speak the word of cheer to a fainting soul—is this sainthood? No, but it is the mustard-seed from which may grow the noblest type of sainthood. And no saintly character ever yet grew from larger seed.

"Think nought a trifle, though it small appear ;

Small sands the mountain, moments make the year,
And trifles life."

But we must not stay longer with this thought. There is a broader interpretation of the picture. The growth of God's kingdom *in the world*—what is that? Is it the extension of the Christian Church? Is it to be

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measured by comparing the little band of disciples clustered about Jesus with the numerous host now enrolled under the banner of the cross? So we are wont to think. And our efforts to build up the kingdom of God are very often mere efforts for Church extension. If the Church grows, we imagine that the kingdom of God is in a prosperous condition. If the Church does not increase in numbers at any particular period, we mourn over the stagnation in the kingdom. Yet the phrase "kingdom of God" as used by our Lord never had any but the remotest and most indirect reference to the Church. Any attempt to measure the growth or progress of the kingdom by merely gaging the increase in numbers in the Church is always misleading. As well attempt to measure the population and progress of an earthly nation by calling the roll of her standing army.

Times of most rapid growth in the Church have not seldom been times of utter stagnation or even of shrinkage in the kingdom of God. When, in the fourth century, Christianity became the state religion of Rome, the Church took a sudden forward stride, but the tide of Christly character flowed backwards. That union brought loss rather than gain to the kingdom of God. We are dealing, let us remember, not with any organization or aggregation of men, but solely with character—the Christly character in individuals and in the race. What was the origin and what has been the progress of Christliness in the world?

Jesus came to a barbarous world. Even the civilizations of the age were the gilded sepulchers of a dead morality. Government was organized oppression and cruelty. Culture was refined iniquity. Religion was a mask of hypocrisy and selfishness. Mankind was sunk in wickedness. The few strong ones were lords. The many weak ones were slaves. Notwithstanding great material progress and external development, the inner

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life of man was at its lowest ebb. Manhood was subservient to materialism. Character had yielded to the lust of power or wealth.

Jesus came; and what did he do? Organize a church? Indirectly, yes. Preach a new and marvelous doctrine? Yes. But he did much more than either. He sowed the seed of divine character in the world. Right into the midst of earth's foulness and sin he dropped it; and it seemed to be lost. But was it lost? Not by any means! It was only hidden in the soil. At once there began the development of a new spiritual consciousness in the race. Imperceptibly at first, but none the less really and irresistibly, new ideals of life and duty sprang up and gradually asserted their sway over the minds of men everywhere. New conceptions of God and of man; new conceptions of the duty of man towards God in worship and in service, of the duty of man towards man in society, of the duties of nations towards each other; new impulses towards mental culture, towards moral elevation, towards material advancement—these and many similar evidences of a new growth began to reveal themselves.

The early Church, as soon as it was deprived of the immediate counsel of Jesus and his apostles, was little better in many respects than the heathenism by which it was surrounded. The doctrinal disputes of the synagogue were introduced into the conclaves of the Church. The methods and spirit of the heathen persecutors were adopted by intolerant disciples. Many times the moral life of recognized Christians exhibited no marked superiority to that of the unchristian world. Yet the divine germ had burst its covering and was steadily shooting up into the life of the race.

Though the movement has been in every age imperceptible, the growth of the tree has been measured from time to time, and these measurements form the great

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epochs of history. The abrogation of sacrifices marks almost the first stage of that growth; the granting of the Magna Charta marks another stage; the great Protestant Reformation, another; the overthrow of the system of human slavery, another; and so on. We sometimes think there is no growth in the character of the race; but if we note the level at widely separated intervals we must be convinced not merely that there is growth, but that it is marvelous in its greatness.

Who can estimate, for example, the difference between ancient tyranny and modern constitutional government? What a measureless stride from the Crusades to the spirit of modern missions! How far the purpose and method of the Arbitration Court at The Hague towers above that of the Holy Alliance at the opening of the nineteenth century! How much grander the meaning embodied in the Red Cross of the twentieth century than in that of the twelfth century, or in the socialism of our time than in the scholasticism of the Middle Ages! The mustard-seed has already become a tree, and that tree is daily growing and sending its branches in shelter over the world. The race is attaining the Christly character, slowly it may be, but none the less surely and blessedly.

"The mustard seed," says Dr. Lyman Abbott, in his *Evolution of Religion*, "is growing to be the greatest of all herbs; but it grows in all directions; some branches pushing upwards to higher planes; some growing only further away from the original stock, different therefrom in apparent direction, yet the same in nature and fruit; some growing downward and earthward;—yet the whole higher in its highest parts, grander in its proportions, and more complexly diversified in its structure than when the Nazarene cast the seed into the ground by the shores of Gennesaret. Then, a solitary physician, healing a few score of halt and lame and blind

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and lepers by a touch or a word,—now, throughout all lands which his presence has made holy, hospitals for every form of disease known among mankind; then, a single feeding of five thousand men, besides women and children, seated in serried ranks upon the ground,—now, an organized benefaction, which, through consecrated channels of commerce, so distributes to the needs of man that in a truly Christian community a famine is well-nigh impossible; then, a single teacher, speaking to a single congregation on the hillside and illustrating the simplest principles of the moral life,—now, unnumbered followers, so instructing men concerning God, duty, love, life, that not only does every nation hear the truth in a dialect which it can understand, but every temperament also in a language of intellect and emotion unconsciously adapted to its special need."

But the end is not yet. The world has not, even in our day, attained to the fulness of its divine growth. The conscience of the race still permits much that is evil, much that is unchristly. The all-powerful nations still stand with folded hands and witness the slaughter of helpless innocence by brutal tyranny. Christendom lets political interests outweigh the needs of suffering humanity. Christian commerce is still based upon the principle of selfish and soulless competition. Christian men still pile up their millions and clothe themselves in purple and fine linen, while their brothers lie at their very gates in rags; and a Christian public praises their thrift. Formal slavery is done away with, but there are still multitudes who are in actual bondage to toil and poverty, with no opportunity for higher mental culture and soul growth. The cries of suffering and wrong are yet to be heard in our most Christian lands, calling for new and broader interpretations of the gospel in daily life.

The tree is large. The fowls of the air lodge already in its branches. But it may grow much more, must grow

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much more, till nations and societies and communities are as truly Christian as individuals; it must grow until politics are as pure and commerce as unselfish as religion; until men make laws and buy and sell goods and study science and even pursue pleasure from the same motive which lured Jesus to Gethsemane and Calvary, namely, to build up Christly character in men and to bring in the reign of the kingdom of God upon earth. It must grow till the mission of the Christ is recognized as the one mission of every son of man, until every human life becomes a true incarnation of God.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed." How often do we complain of the littleness of our lives, the limitations of our influence! We make these the excuse for all manner of uselessness and failure. We draw back from duty on the ground that we have no great opportunities, no extraordinary talents. We persuade ourselves that on this account nothing is required of us. But every one has small opportunities, a few talents. These God has given to us, and he would have us cast them into the earth like the tiny mustard-seed, that they may grow and become great. These little things are possessed of a divine life. Consecrate them to God, use them faithfully in his service and according to his laws, and they will expand and multiply beyond our largest imaginings. Infinite possibilities lie hidden within them.

Would you know the real value of life? Learn the significance of little things. God does not give us trees full grown. He gives us the seed, and every seed is the repository of infinite possibilities. As a little temptation may betray the soul and by gradual development lead at last to monstrous sin and the complete wreckage of character, so a minute seed of good, carefully nourished and cultivated, may spring up and bring forth fruit unto everlasting life. A cup of cold water given in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ may awaken the dor-

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mant life in the human heart and become the source of a transformed character.

Then,—

“Scorn not the slightest word or deed,
Nor deem it void of power;
There’s fruit in each wind-wafted seed,
That waits its natal hour.

“A whispered word may touch the heart,
And call it back to life;
A look of love bid sin depart,
And still unholy strife.

“No act falls fruitless; none can tell
How vast its power may be;
Nor what results infolded dwell
Within it silently.”

The Influence of Character

CHAPTER V

The Influence of Character

THE LEAVEN

Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21

Text.—“*It was all leavened.*”—Matt. 13:33

THE spiritual ideals of most men would find a fitting type in the gold or the diamond. Jesus never employs them for figures. His chosen symbols of Christian character are salt, light, leaven. Do you see the difference? The human ideal emphasizes value or beauty; the divine ideal lays the stress upon power.

Gold, what is it? A standard of value; an emblem of purity and worth; the most precious of metals, sought with equal persistence for coinage and for ornament. What is the diamond? A gem of priceless worth and unrivaled beauty. The gold and the diamond are thus fitting symbols of purity and value; but they are also types of selfishness or want of power.

For ages untold diamonds have lain buried in the mines of Brazil and South Africa, and the sparkling grains of gold have mingled in the sands of California and the Yukon Valley; yet in all these ages no smallest particle of sand has been changed by the contact, no atom of rock has felt any influence from the metal or the gem to transform its nature or increase its value. Age after age they lie there, precious metal and worthless sand, priceless jewel and profitless rock, side by side, the sand and the rock no whit better for the fellowship.

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Does not that well represent much of the religion that has claimed the attention of men? Does it not represent too truthfully much of the religion that passes current under the name of Christian? Have we not churches pure as the gold, priceless as the diamond, beautiful congregations of beautiful people, that are absolutely without influence in the world, as cold and exclusive as they are pure and refined? Not such was Jesus' ideal of Christian life and character. He says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened."

There is a picture of *The Influence of Character*.

What is leaven? Any substance that produces fermentation. The name is very indefinite, and no one cares what the exact substance is. The precise material of which it is composed may vary indefinitely. The effect which it produces is the one matter of importance. (It is a transforming force.)

The parable of The Mustard Seed fixed our attention upon the object itself, that is, upon the growing plant, and so led us directly to the growing spiritual reality, the Christly character. The entire significance of the picture centered upon that. But in the parable now before us we do not know what the material substance is. We only know its effect. In fact, the substance itself, whatever it is, is soon lost, absorbed in the larger mass. The leaven was hidden in three measures of meal till the meal was all—what? Leaven? No. Till it was all *leavened*. The noun gives place to a verb. Matter is made subordinate to force. The worker is for the time overshadowed by its work. We may therefore dismiss all questions about the woman, the meal, the three measures, and even the general significance of leaven, and concentrate our thought upon the one simple idea, *influence*.

Character is the greatest of moral forces. No true

character can exist among men without exerting a clearly defined and helpful influence. Men of genuine excellence in every station in life, men of integrity, of probity, of high principle, of sterling honesty of purpose, command the spontaneous homage of mankind. It is natural to believe in such men and to imitate them. All that is good in the world is upheld by them, and without their presence in it the world would not be worth living in. Genius commands admiration, wisdom or learning may excite wonder, power may compel outward submission, wealth may allure flattery, but character alone secures respect and exerts a transforming influence upon men.

"Every true man," says Emerson, "is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design;—and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients. A man, Cæsar, is born, and for ages after we have a Roman empire. . . . And all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."

The history of all human progress is but the history of the working and influence of character in the gradual maturing of the race life. Character is always and everywhere the measure of a man's power and of a man's possibilities in the molding of his fellows.

How vast an influence, for example, has emanated from the character of that noble man, Dr. Thomas Arnold of Rugby!—an influence that was felt in the school long after his death. His character seemed to have infused itself into the very fiber of the institution, and to have continued to exert its power for many years. "His very presence," says his biographer, "seemed to create a new spring of health and vigor within his pupils, and to give to life an interest and an elevation which remained with them long after they had left him, and dwelt so habitually in their thoughts, as a living image, that, when death had taken him away, the bond appeared to be still unbroken, and the sense of separation al-

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most lost in the still deeper sense of a life and union indestructible. And thus it was that Dr. Arnoid trained a host of manly and noble characters who spread the influence of his example in all parts of the world."

Of Dugald Stewart, also, it has been said that he breathed the love of virtue into whole generations of pupils. Benjamin Franklin, too, while in London, by the simple force of his personal dignity and truly refined and lofty character, reformed the manners of the entire establishment with which he was connected. The godly character of Edward Payson was a more effective and lasting power for good than even his eloquent preaching.

Who has not seen illustrations without number of the influence of independent, aggressive, active character, for either good or ill? How many lives have been ruined, how many communities have been corrupted, by contact with some individual of positively low or wicked character! And what may not one noble character and consecrated life effect in purifying and uplifting other lives?

Captain John Brown once said to Emerson, "For a settler in a new country, one good, believing man is worth a hundred, nay, worth a thousand men without character. His example is so contagious that all other men are directly and beneficially influenced by him, and he insensibly elevates and lifts them up to his own standard of energetic activity."

True, unquestionably true! Every page of history attests its truth. What has made the difference that we see between New England and Mexico to-day? The difference in prosperity, in intelligence, in enterprise, in moral and social life, whence does it spring? Whence, indeed, but from the influence of the religious refugees in the one case and the gold-hunting adventurers in the other who first settled the two portions of our continent? What marks the present difference between Mas-

sachusetts and Virginia? Is it not the difference in character between Puritan and Cavalier continuing to manifest itself? Why do we find such a diversity of character in the different cities on this continent, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Montreal, Quebec? Religiously, morally, intellectually, socially, in enterprise and in spirit they differ to-day pretty much as their founders differed generations ago. It is the influence of personal character perpetuated.

If we study the characteristics of the different branches of the Christian Church, we find that they are not to be explained entirely as the outgrowth of diverse creeds and methods. They embody to a large degree the characters of their early leaders. Doctrinal differences are becoming confused. It is no easy matter in modern times to draw hard and fast lines between Arminianism and Calvinism as forms of belief, or even between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. But Wesleyanism and Calvinism still stand out very clearly as types of character. The personal influence and character of an Augustine, a Hildebrand, a Zinzendorf, a Wesley, a Calvin, or a Whitefield abide with us long after his peculiar teachings have been forgotten or discarded.

The influence of character may not always be clearly traceable, nevertheless that influence always makes itself felt, and it reaches farther than we are wont to believe, changing other characters, molding other lives, not only as they come into immediate contact with it, but even when they are far removed in distance and time or belong to a later generation. It is precisely like the leaven which affects not only the particles of meal contiguous to it, but through these the particles farthest removed.

The power of Christianity lies in this all-pervading influence of character. Not the mere teaching of Jesus, not a new system of religious philosophy which he introduced, won the hearts of men and turned them to

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righteousness. It was the character of Jesus that conquered human hearts and transformed human lives. And you remember how he promised the same power to his followers. He said, "Ye shall receive power,"—when? When ye have learned my doctrine? No. When ye are proficient in my methods? No. "Ye shall receive power, *when the Holy Spirit is come upon you.*" In other words, Ye shall have power when ye begin to develop the Christly character.

The leaven assimilates the particles of meal to itself. While not changing the substance of the meal, the leaven imparts to it the peculiar quality of force embodied in itself, without losing any part of its own peculiar property. So Jesus, coming into contact with humanity, imparts to it his own nature. When he touched the leper, he was not defiled, but communicated his own pure and healthy life to the diseased man. When he took our human nature upon him, he was not contaminated with its inherited sinfulness, but instead he became the source of a new moral health for the race.

See the city of Corinth steeped in unnamable vice and gangrened with moral rotteness, till the leaven of Christian character touched and transformed many of its inhabitants, making them pure and true, and winning for them from their fellows the title of "saint." Nor is that a solitary or even extraordinary instance. The history of Christian missions repeats the story again and again. The influence of that pure and holy character has wrought a similar change in Madagascar, in Fiji, in Hawaii, and in many islands of the Pacific. In our own land it has entered many a Five Points and has brought order and peace and decency where before was only lowest vice and most abject wretchedness. Indeed, all corrective agencies that are at work successfully upon the moral life of men whether at home or abroad spring from this leavening power of Christly character, which is Christ himself perpetually incarnate.

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The same influence has taken hold of all the manifold departments of our complex life, and has given to all new impulses and higher aspirations. Character affects intellect, it affects taste, it affects even the physical man. The scientific researches and discoveries of our times are the manifestations of a growing intellectual life stimulated by the Christly character. Our advancing social institutions, our free and enlightened governments, our unbounded literary activities, our countless individual comforts and amenities, our sacred home life, our universal education—all these and many other things that we esteem purely secular, but which form a large part of our modern progress, are directly traceable to the effervescent working of the Christly character in the race.

We often urge upon disciples the universal duty of preaching the gospel. That is well; but there is a duty far more important. Each disciple should be a center of Christian influence. The character of every follower of Jesus should be contagious. It should affect positively every other character with which it comes in contact. In fact, this is the way, the only way, in which leaven spreads. It goes through the meal particle by particle. The little leaven in the center of the mass cannot directly affect the meal at a distance from itself. It simply leavens the particles next to itself, and these in turn become leavening influences which act upon their neighbors, and so the process is continued till at length the particles most remote from the center are touched and transformed.

The character of Jesus could not directly touch the lives of all men. It touched twelve, seventy, a hundred and twenty, or more hearts, and changed them into the likeness of the Saviour; and that was all. But these, being leavened, exerted an influence upon others. Andrew, being leavened, touched Peter and leavened him. Jesus leavened Philip, and Philip leavened Nathanael.

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So the influence has spread from heart to heart and from age to age. To-day it becomes your duty and mine to disseminate this influence to those particles of humanity that lie nearest to us. Every man, woman and child with whom we come in contact should receive from us something of this contagious spirit of the living Christ.

It is said of Jesus that, at one time as the multitudes crowded about him to touch him, "As many as touched him were made whole." There is the thought of our parable in the concrete. There was the contagious influence of his divine health of body making everybody well by mere contact, though no word was spoken. That is what the kingdom of heaven means for us, does through us. When it is set up in our hearts, when we have come to understand the true ideal of Christian character, we shall think of it, not as something to be possessed and enjoyed, but as something to be continually imparted, as something that ought to bless all with whom we associate. If we are worthy disciples of our Master, it will be true of us as of Jesus that as many as touch us will be made whole. Our lives will be potent. Apart from all words that we speak and all merely external acts that we perform, there will be a continuous radiation of silent and often unconscious influence. Wherever we go we shall create an atmosphere of Christliness. Souls will be stimulated to new endeavors; lives will be made ashamed of unworthiness and led to loftier aims. Yes, even the physical life will be stimulated and strengthened. Christly character has not yet wholly lost its power over bodily disease, though the Church has relegated that power in great measure to fanatics and extremists. I once heard it said of a Christian physician by a patient, "I always like to have Dr. — call. I am stronger for the visit even when he gives me no medicine, for there is something about the very atmosphere and spirit of the man that

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thrills me with new life." Had the Christian Church held fast to her privilege in this matter, had she maintained intact the "faith once delivered to the saints," not as a matter of mere creed statement and orthodoxy but of real trust in the power of the living Christ, she might not in these later days be troubled by the schismatic extremes of the "Faith Cure" and "Christian Science."

One thought I have not yet touched upon which perhaps demands a passing notice. It is this: Leaven is in itself the essence of corruption. In nearly every passage of Scripture where mentioned it is a symbol of evil. Strange, is it not, that this same substance should be chosen as an emblem of the true life? What does it mean? You cannot eat leaven. It does not contain the properties that sustain life. Nevertheless it serves a very important purpose in rendering more palatable, possibly more wholesome also, the bread that we eat and by which life is nourished. Without the leaven our bread would be poor indeed. It is the power of something, in itself far from perfect, to improve something else, that symbolizes genuine discipleship.

This quality of corruption in the leaven has proved a stumbling-block to an occasional expositor who has attempted to square every element in the parable with some divine teaching and to deduce a special lesson from each distinct phase of the picture. Such expositors have quite overlooked the fact that Jesus makes no reference to the substance of the leaven, but only to its pervading and transforming influence. That is the only quality of the leaven that he brings out in the parable, and it is evidently the only quality that he had in mind at the time of speaking. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven in the one particular only, i. e., its influence. The worst character is want of character. Mere negative do-nothing-ism, though it be

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spotless, has nothing Christlike or heavenly about it. True character is always positive and strongly aggressive.

Have you never wondered at the fascination that is often exerted by evil lives? We read the story of some notorious sinner and before we are aware, although we know him to be a rascal, we find ourselves admiring his character. Probably few persons have ever read Milton's *Paradise Lost* without feeling a certain respect for Satan, in spite of the great poet's effort to make him the impersonation of all evil. Why is this? Is it not because of the positiveness, because of the aggressive force that reveals itself in the delineation of the archfiend's character? Such positiveness is fascinating even when found in connection with traits the most unworthy. How much more when allied to upright character and noble purpose does it enhance their value!

Time has been, I am not sure that it is now wholly past, when the ideal of sainthood has been represented as weak and negative in character. Some of us still find it difficult to get rid of the notion that the model Christian is a namby-pamby sort of a person lacking the strongest and most virile elements of the manly character. The ghost of the old Sunday-school book hero occasionally haunts our present-day religion, and while we consider him a pattern of goodness, we reserve our admiration and real worship for others less saintly.

The figure of the leaven ought to have made such weak ideals forever impossible. It brands all moral effeminacy as unchristian. It imprints the stamp of condemnation upon mere negative goodness. From the other parables we learn that the heavenly character must always be pure and beautiful. In and of itself it is a priceless treasure, a jewel of surpassing value; yet, after all, the most perfect character utterly fails in its mission if it does not exert a potent influence upon others.

Even the spotless purity and unequalled beauty of

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Jesus' own character would have been absolutely worthless had there not gone forth from him that perpetually divine influence which made itself felt by all who came to him, and which has continued to make itself felt all through the ages. Consequently when the Master sought for types of discipleship he seldom took things of intrinsic value like the gold, the diamond, or even the meal. Instead of these, salt, light, leaven are his chosen symbols. Does he therefore mean to belittle the value of character in itself? Not at all; but he would emphasize the paramount importance of influence. Purity is vital; for the pure in heart, and they alone, shall see God. Moral beauty and symmetry are eminently to be desired; but contagion is more than these. To be noble is good so far as it goes; to ennoble others goes farther and is infinitely better. To keep oneself unspotted from the world is a worthy aim when it goes hand in hand with the higher aim to cleanse the world itself of some of its spots.

Is not this a very distinct and lofty ideal of character that Jesus sets before us in the parable of The Leaven? To many Christians the great end of religion seems to be the salvation of their own souls. Others talk of a "higher Christian life"; but even that is a self-absorbed struggle for purity and sanctification. Now the Master would not have us neglect these aims, but he would have us think of them, not as ends, but as means to an end far greater than either. He bids us cultivate the Christly character for the sake of others, save self in order to save the world, seek the fulness of the heavenly life in order that we may become centers of heavenly light and joy and power, transforming all about us, until the kingdom of God shall come not alone in our hearts but in all the earth.

The Value of Character

CHAPTER VI

The Value of Character

THE TREASURE

Matt. 13:44

Text.—“*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure.*”—

Matt. 13:44 (1st cl.)

WE commonly reckon wealth in dollars and cents. We account a man rich when he controls hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. If his income be small we call him poor. Yet money itself is not wealth, nor can it always secure wealth for its possessor. At best it is simply an instrument for the convenient exchange or transfer of wealth. Misers have perished in rags and starvation while they possessed thousands of shining coins safely hidden away in their coffers. Miserably poor was that one who fell down in the streets of Herculaneum fatally overburdened by the very gold which he was seeking to rescue from the grasp of the fiery storm; rich beyond compare the possessor of a few pence with contentment, peace, freedom, a pure life and a clear conscience.

Time was when men supposed the wealth of nations or of individuals to consist in the amount of gold, silver, or other precious metals in their possession. But Adam Smith, the father of modern economic science, exposed the fallacy of this notion, and banished it forever from the realm of intelligent thought.

The wealth of nations is represented by things far

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different from precious metal. The wealth of this nation, for example, may be gaged much more accurately by our wheat and cotton crops, by our libraries and public schools, by our well-managed railroads, our free institutions, and our comfortable homes, than by the amount of bullion in our national treasury. By the same token it is not stocks and bonds, not wages nor interest money, that measures the wealth of the individual, but the power to satisfy personal needs, to obtain food when hungry, to secure clothing when cold or naked, to furnish that which shall meet every need of the being, body, mind and soul.

Satisfaction is the ultimate measure of wealth—the satisfaction of need. That most truly represents wealth which contributes most to human satisfaction. He is richest whose needs are most perfectly developed and most completely satisfied. But he who, while possessing gold uncounted, is unable to obtain satisfaction or contentment is poor indeed.

This axiom of modern science Jesus announced, ages before the birth of Adam Smith, in the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure." In these words are embodied the Master's definition of wealth; and the parable which they introduce is a clear illustration of his meaning.

The entire story centers upon the word "Treasure." Upon this word converge all the radii of its detail. From this word we must interpret the whole. Here is the pith and essence of truth. All else is incidental or subordinate.

"A *hidden* treasure," says one. No, rather a discovered treasure. The word "hidden" has no bearing upon the thought of the parable other than to emphasize the significance of the key-word "Treasure," and to impress upon the hearer more deeply the fact of its great value.

"The field," says another, "what does that represent?"

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Nothing in particular, I reply. The treasure must be placed somewhere. The field is simply a necessary background and finding place for the treasure. In this case the field was made for the treasure, not the treasure for the field. Every picture must have a background, and the true artist will so choose or arrange this that it shall contribute to the effectiveness of the central figure. If it distract attention from that, it is a fatal defect.

"But how about the finding? Was that a matter of chance? And are we to conclude that one may stumble on the kingdom of heaven who is not seeking it?" Again I say, The treasure, *the treasure*, that is the important thing. The man is merely an instrument for discovering that and placing it before us. Of the method of discovery nothing is said; therefore we may draw no conclusions from it.

"What of the conduct of the finder? Was it right for him to conceal—" Ah! there we go, again, chasing the motes in the sunbeam, instead of using the light which the beam sheds to examine the heaven-drawn picture. Whether right or wrong, the action of the man is perfectly natural and true to life, and the pains taken to conceal the treasure is another item of testimony to its value. Also the joy manifested is an added word to the same effect.

In short, all the various details of the parable are but so many lines of light focusing upon a single point. The hiding, the finding, the concealment, the joy, the sale, the purchase—all these are true to human experience and give life and interest to the story. Without them it would be no story at all. Even Jesus could not frame a parable about an abstract or imaginary treasure. Change the details so as to make every action perfectly proper and independently instructive, and the parable would be as unreal and as insipid as many a modern Sunday-school book. But take them just as

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they come to us from the lips of the Great Teacher, let them interpret themselves, and they reiterate in every line the cumulative thought—*the treasure and its value*.

Thus analyzed, the interpretation of the parable is clear. The treasure represents the kingdom of heaven, so says our Lord. And he seeks to impress upon his hearers the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the parable sets forth in living and concrete fashion, *the supreme value of Christly character*.

The Christly character is like a treasure. That is to say, the Christly character is wealth. It is a possession of transcendent value. It is a mine of exhaustless blessing. It is a fountain of perennial joy. In comparison with this, all other riches are as nothing. To obtain this by the sacrifice of all else is infinite gain. It is in itself the embodiment of the highest and best things the heart can desire. Such character is happiness. Such character is eternal life. Such character is heaven.

How we envy the fortunate individual who first discovered the glittering particles of gold in Suter's mill-race in the early days of California, or how we wish we might have been in place of that one who first noted the oily surface of certain streams in Pennsylvania and was led to bore for petroleum! Do we? Do we? Why? Because they were by their good fortune enabled to obtain many things that afforded them pleasure and satisfaction. But there is another, unspeakably more enviable—the man who has attained to the Christly character. For, after all, the treasure is but a type, and a very imperfect type at that. Character is the reality, glorious, indestructible.

The word of Jesus will endure the most searching test of modern scientific thought. Apply the test, if you will, and note how completely its demands are met. I have said that, according to the modern ideal, satisfaction is the measure of wealth. Now Christly character

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is wealth, because it satisfies human needs. It satisfies all needs, and it satisfies them completely.

In the first place, *the Christly character is wealth, because it satisfies our physical or material needs.* That is to say, it enables us to satisfy these. Have we not the promise, "Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"? In other words, Seek first and above all things else the Christly character; let this be the supreme purpose and aim of your life, and your bodily wants will be abundantly satisfied.

If Christians only believed this promise! But they do not. It is received by the majority of disciples as exceedingly general and even purely figurative. Yet it has proven itself true, literally true, in every age. The material riches of the world to-day are in the hands of Christian peoples. Godly men hold the purse-strings of the nations. To be sure, the faithful servants of God are not always rich in money and creature comforts, nor are the wicked always poor; but every careful student of social problems, in this or any other land, will tell you that it is a most unusual thing to find earnest Christians living in abject poverty, squalor, or misery. The low, the miserable, the discontented, the wretchedly poor and starving classes are composed almost entirely of the ungodly. And in most cases their ungodliness is the direct cause of their pitiful condition. Material improvement follows close upon the heels of moral reform. In the train of character are diligence and thrift, the heralds of earthly prosperity. Not one, but many, are the witnesses who testify —

"I have been young, and now am old;
Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his seed begging bread."

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To stimulate or increase physical needs is one of the first results of gospel preaching. The pagan tribe that receives the truth at once begins to seek more and better things in the way of bodily satisfaction. There is a desire for better food and clothing, better and more comfortable homes, pleasanter surroundings. The demand for material things is multiplied manifold. But if the demand is thus increased the supply is increased far more. The new spirit creates wants only to satisfy them abundantly. The Christianized nation always contributes more to the material possessions of the race than it takes from them. All manner of bodily comforts and satisfactions are found among the invariable by-products of Christianity. They are the never-failing accompaniments if not the direct results of the development of the Christly character.

Again, *the Christly character is wealth, because it satisfies the intellectual needs of men.* Sanctified character is always a source of new mental activity and power. Moral elevation is a fountain of intellectual inspiration. However we may explain it, the fact is apparent to all that the secrets of the universe discover themselves to the godly mind when the ungodly question them in vain. Even in the matter of purely scientific research or geographical discovery or mechanical invention the saying holds true, "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom."

The intellectual activity and achievement of this twentieth century is bounded by the same lines that bound Christendom. All science and learning, all art and culture and refinement worthy the name, are to be found among the nominally Christian peoples. To be sure it is fashionable in certain quarters at the present time to talk of the learning of India, and to speak of the wonderful achievements of the Oriental nations as though these were in some way far in advance of the mental attainments of our Western peoples. A very lit-

tle study is sufficient to expose the fallacy of such claims, and to show the utter childishness of much of this lauded wisdom, and the ineffectiveness of all of it to uplift or satisfy men.

And what of individuals? Who are the leaders of the intellectual progress of our time? Are they not, for the most part, Christian men and women? Our Agassizs, our Darwins, and our Dawsons are men who have studied the creation in the spirit of devout reverence for the Creator. Our Tennysons and our Longfellows, our Brownings and our Whittiers, have been inspired by the same reverent spirit. True poetry of the highest order is not and cannot be the product of godless souls.

Time would fail to review the long array of names that are famous in the realm of art, of music, of discovery, of invention, that bear witness to the influence of character upon mind. Is not that indeed a treasure of priceless value that has given to us the poems of a Milton, the dramas of a Shakespeare, the essays of an Emerson, the writings of a Ruskin, the music of a Beethoven, or a Handel, the learning of a hundred Newtons, the discoveries of a Columbus, the inventions of a Watt, a Stephenson, a Morse, an Edison, a Marconi, the philosophy of a Spencer, the beneficent achievements of a Howe or a Morton?

Often enough we may hear these intellectual prodigies spoken of as the fruits of Christianity; but just what do we mean by that? Are they the outgrowth of a certain religious philosophy? Do they find their source and inspiration in a peculiar form of religious teaching known as Christian? No. They are the direct result of the formation and growth of Christly character in human hearts. It is character and not mere teaching or culture that lies at the foundation of intellectual progress. Men have sought *the kingdom of God* and have found it; and these things have been added according to the promise.

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The gospel of the kingdom is not first of all a gospel of contentment. It does not make men indifferent to natural desire. The rather does it stimulate desire and aspiration in every right direction. Wants hitherto unrecognized are awakened only to be more than satisfied. The Spirit of Christ gives rise to ever greater longings, and then satisfies them completely. It infinitely extends a man's horizon, and makes life more truly worth the living. Under its influence the conception of life's possibilities is greatly enlarged, and a godly discontent springs up in the soul that clamors for higher satisfaction and receives it. Into every little event and duty a deeper meaning is infused, and thus these are rendered sacred. Every faculty is toned up and brought into most fruitful exercise.

The Christly character furnishes the only adequate motive for the highest intellectual effort and aspiration. It furnishes the only key that can unlock the secrets of the universe. It furnishes the only reasonable hope of unlimited intellectual progress. In a word, Christly character, and that alone, fully satisfies the intellectual needs of man.

Yet again, *the Christly character is wealth, because it satisfies the spiritual needs of the race.* This, which is almost a truism, is of supreme importance. When we are confronted with the deepest, the most vital needs of all human life, the eternal needs of the soul, these find no satisfaction except in Christliness of character. Give a man material wealth, fame, power, learning, culture—in short, give him everything else that the heart can desire or the mind conceive, yet if the wants of the soul be unsatisfied there can be no true, no lasting, happiness. Men have been utterly miserable in the possession of gold and silver uncounted, in the enjoyment of gifts and opportunities without limit, in the giddy whirl of pleasures and pastimes, because the spiritual nature has been neglected. On the other hand, supply the wants

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of the soul, and though every other satisfaction be cut off, there may be joy unspeakable. Here is a source of blessedness that no disaster can destroy and no emergency exhaust.

The old Stoic philosophers sought to remove the ills of life by cultivating the spirit of indifference in men, by making them content with whatever lot might be theirs. It was a sort of moral anesthetic by which the finer senses of the being were dulled and rendered less sensitive to pain and suffering. Not such is the method of Christ. He never corrects a discord by destroying the ear, nor removes evil sights by putting out the eye. Nor is "Resignation" the last word of the gospel. So far from this, true godliness renders every faculty of body and soul the more sensitive, and then seeks to satisfy the demands of that sensitiveness. It imparts to the ear a new power so that it feels more than ever the harshness of life's discords, yet through all the din and the discord it can discern the sweet and heavenly harmonies. It makes the eye so keen that even in the most distressing or revolting scenes it can discover some tokens of the presence and love of God. It makes the heart more tender in the presence of sorrow or bereavement, and then it steals in with the balm of infinite comfort and peace.

But all has not yet been said. *The Christly character is a treasure of supreme value, because we can carry it with us to the next world and find it no less current there than here.* Of all things human character alone is eternal. "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." The kingdom of heaven is a treasure in life, it is a treasure in death, it is a treasure throughout all eternity. Its value does not diminish with the passage of time. It rather goes on accumulating by a sort of compound interest through this life,

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and the dividends continue through all the endless ages of eternity.

Tested thus by the most approved standard of modern economic science, the Christly character is wealth; for it supplies all human wants and meets all human needs for time and for eternity.

Now turn the thought back again to the parable. We feel no surprise in view of the action that followed upon the discovery of the treasure. It is most natural. "In his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

Of course he does! What else could we expect, if he is a man of sound mind? Is he a poor man, think you, because he parted with all his possessions in order to purchase one field? Was his conduct that of a madman? Very, very far from it. He has only exchanged poverty for wealth, or moderate means for great possessions. He is a richer man to-day than ever before. It was for this that he made the exchange. It was no loss to sell all his property that he might obtain the treasure. It was gain, *great gain*.

So is it with every one that secures the kingdom of heaven at whatever cost. He has made himself unspeakably richer thereby. Take the case of Paul, the apostle. Think how much he gave up when he became a disciple of Jesus. Friends, position, honor, wealth, influence, every prospect of advancement, all were laid upon the altar. Men standing outside the kingdom and seeing only what he gave up might call him a fool; but in sober truth, even when tried by a purely commercial standard, he was a wise and far-seeing man. After a long experience of the value of Christliness he says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Such is the testimony of one who knows the

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worth of the treasure he has obtained. There is no regretful look at the past; no feeling of loss and self-sacrifice; but only a clear and satisfactory consciousness of great gain.

And like testimony comes to us from countless witnesses in all the ages of the Christian Church. It is confirmed by the experience of every true Christian in our own day. Every sacrifice made for God and in the service of others, every surrender made in the quest of the Christly character, is infinitely rewarded. No duty is irksome; the sense of self-denial is impossible; for all feeling of sacrifice or loss is swallowed up in love for the Master and in the joy which he brings to us.

The kingdom of heaven *is* like a treasure. Oh, for the power of the divine Spirit to make us really believe this truth! There is nothing in all the wide world of such priceless value as the Christly character. Without that, riches, honor, learning, power, talent, are of little worth; they may even become the instruments of evil and sorrow. Without it we cannot know the truest happiness for the present nor the largest hope for the future. Without it we are in bondage to the world and the things of the world. With it we are free, we are rich, we are truly blessed. With it all things are ours for time and for eternity.

And this possession is within the reach of all. In every heart it lies. Hidden it may be by sin, by neglect, by worldliness; covered deep perhaps it is by generations of misdoing or false teaching. Still it is there. Every human life is a field in which this precious treasure lies concealed. Yet how many seem utterly unconscious of it! We go about like men and women walking over an undiscovered gold mine, little heeding the wealth that lies just beneath our feet. Talent may be denied us. We may have few opportunities of useful service, and those we have may seem insignificant. It may not be ours to achieve great worldly success. But that which

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is infinitely more important, the attainment of a Christ-like character, is within the reach of even the humblest and weakest.

How may it be won? There is only one way. Surrender all to the Master. Give up everything for his service, submit everything to his will. The result is certain. "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, . . . and in the world to come eternal life."

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acquaintance - good
friendship - better
love - best
Respect of others - good
Self respect better -
unimpaired conscience - best
Love for others - good
" " neighbors - better
" " enemies - best

Character of Business men
1. Integrity
2. ability to give attention to details
3. methodical order - prayer
4. recreation

CHAPTER VII

The Cost of Character

THE MERCHANTMAN AND THE PEARL

Matt. 13: 45, 46

Text.—“*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant,*”
etc.—Matt. 13:45

POSSESSIONS may be viewed from two angles. We may look upon them in the light of their value, or we may think of them with relation to their cost. These two points of view are by no means identical. Indeed, they reveal no fixed or determinate relation one to the other. An object or gift may be of exceeding value and cost little or nothing; on the other hand, that which costs much may have little real value.

Air and water cost us nothing. “Free as air” or “Free as water” have become proverbial expressions; for although these are gifts of priceless value, we receive them without money and without price. (Our water-rates in the city are a tax for pipes and machinery by which the water is brought into our houses, not a payment for the water itself.) By contrast, gold, diamonds, jewels of all sorts are very costly, yet their intrinsic value is slight.

Satisfaction is the one test of value. Air and water satisfy certain imperative needs of man. We could not live without them. They are absolutely essential to the sustaining of physical life. Possessing them in abun-

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dance and purity we are immeasurably richer than those whose supply of either is limited or of a poor quality. And he who is cut off from either may well envy the beggar by the wayside. Not so is it with jewels, gold, precious stones. At best these only satisfy a superficial need, the demands of pride or the esthetic sense. Their costliness is artificial and wholly out of proportion to their worth.

Sometimes, however, cost and value are nearly equal, and move up and down the scale together. This is true of food, clothing material, and the commoner necessities of life under ordinary circumstances. Their cost is regulated chiefly by their value.

Now what has this discussion of value and cost to do with our Lord's parables? Simply this: The distinction which I have tried to bring out is precisely that which is embodied or illustrated in the two parables of The Treasure and The Merchantman.

Not the titles that I have given them, "The Treasure" and "The Merchantman." These two companion pictures are often confused or discussed together as though they were practically identical in their meaning. The titles usually affixed to them betray and increase this confusion. They are most frequently known as the parables of "The Hidden Treasure" and "The Pearl of Great Price." In exposition they are made to cover much the same ground and to teach the same lessons. Even so clear and scholarly a writer as Dr. Dods says, "These two parables have one and the same object. They are meant to exhibit the incomparable value of the kingdom of heaven." Others of equal note take similar ground. Nevertheless I venture to ask, Is this the true interpretation?

Let us interrogate the parables themselves. In the former parable the Great Teacher begins by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure." Had he intended to repeat the same truth under a different fig-

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ure we should expect him to say, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a *pearl*." Such a comparison would have been at once appropriate and truthful. But, as a matter of fact, he does not say that. What he does say is, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant." The index-finger of the one parable points to a treasure, rich and attractive; that of the second directs our attention to a man, bids us study his character and follow his action. Both parables present the two figures, but the light is shifted so that in the one the treasure glitters while the man stands in the shadow, and in the other the sun shines on the man while the treasure is in the darker background. It is like a sentence in which the emphasis is transferred from one part to the other, so wholly changing the meaning. The former parable centered our attention upon the thought of value; the lesson embodied in the latter is that of cost, *the cost of the Christly character*.

"Bless God, salvation's free!" we sing; and we ring the changes on that favorite quotation of many, "Without money and without price." We often forget that the invitation of the great prophet reads, not "Come, take," but "Come, *buy* wine and milk without money and without price." Of course there is a sense in which salvation (i. e., the perfected character) is absolutely free, the gift of God. But there is another sense, and a very important sense, in which the Christly character is the most costly thing on earth. It can be obtained only by the surrender of all things else. Even life itself must not be withheld if we are to win the coveted possession.

This is the truth which Jesus illustrates and enforces through the parable of "The Merchantman and the Pearl." This is the golden thread which will guide us through its details and enable us to discover the mean-

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ing of each. It is the central thought upon which the picture is focused.

Look with me for a few moments at the picture of the divine Artist. In the foreground stands an Oriental merchant, keen, diligent, enterprising, and thoroughly understanding his business. Here is our object-lesson. In his conduct and spirit we find a type of the wise character seeker. Do not lose sight of him for an instant. Watch him closely, study him carefully.

There he is now, rushing off to the market at the earliest possible moment, "seeking goodly pearls." No indifference about this merchant of ours. He is an active, energetic, busy man. He means to succeed in life, to get rich, to take a leading place among his fellow merchants. Wait for something to turn up, does he? Oh, no. He goes forth resolved to turn something up. He knows that success is not a matter of chance, but that it follows clearly defined laws. He hopes to become wealthy not by luck, but because he puts into operation the conditions of success. He is wise, sane, thrifty. And these qualities never fail to insure success in the world of commerce.

He is off *to the market*, I say. He does not rush blindly about here and there. He does not go to a blacksmith or an apothecary in his quest. He goes directly to the fisheries or the pearl traders. He is in search of pearls and he does not expect to find them in a fruit store or at a ball game. He is a man of practical common sense, and he adapts the means used to the end in view.

Follow him so far, if you can. Has he not given you one good lesson, possibly two, already? The first condition of finding is seeking. True, God's blessings sometimes come to those who are not seeking them. The careless, idle wanderer may stumble by mere chance upon a rich treasure; but this is not the rule. In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand the

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successful men, in a material sense, are those who have sought earnestly, patiently, for success, and have fulfilled the conditions upon which it is based. Luck brings an occasional fortune to some "Lord" Timothy Dexter in return for an investment of childish folly. Once in a century a Bret Harte's "Jim Dow" may strike gold when he is digging for water. But these are the rare exceptions. On the other hand, pluck and hard work always win in the battle of life.

So in spiritual things; doubtless souls have been touched by the divine Spirit at most unexpected moments and amid very unspiritual surroundings. A Conwell is converted at a card-table and a John Newton on board a slave-ship. But this is exceedingly uncommon. As a rule, you will not be converted in a gambling-hell, nor develop a spirit of prayer by staying away from the house of God or neglecting the prayer-meeting. You may not hope to attain to a Christlike character and saintly life while your boon companions are godless persons and your chosen occupations selfish or sinful. There is no promise in the Scriptures or in reason of great spiritual attainments for the indifferent and careless. But the Word of God is full of encouragement to the active and intelligent seeker.

"Seek ye the Lord Jehovah while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." These are typical promises of the Bible which find abundant corroboration in nature and experience. The law is universal, unfailing. Who would attain to success must strive for it. Who would find the truth must seek for it. Who would become Christlike must put

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forth Christly endeavor, must emulate the Christly spirit, must dare the Christly sacrifice, must consort with Christly people.

Strange, is it not? that persons who are wise as serpents in all material things are foolish beyond all account where spiritual matters are concerned. Strange that multitudes of men who profess a desire for conversion should never put themselves in the way of the Spirit's influence! Strange that numberless disciples should continually bemoan their spiritual leanness, and all the while they neglect the prayer-meeting, and devote themselves to worldly business or pleasures, and choose the company of low or unspiritual people! As reasonable to seek for pearls in a slaughter-house as for spiritual experiences in the stock-market—look for priceless jewels in a shoe factory as soon as conversions at bridge whist. It is not a question of comparative values or of right and wrong in the things mentioned, but simply a question of common sense regarding the relations of condition and result. A single glance at our pearl merchant ought to cover many a would-be disciple with shame and confusion of face.

Now look again at our merchantman. He is in the market before us. About him are numerous tradesmen with their wares. Some of the gems they offer are fine, large and clear; others small and imperfect. For a time he looks eagerly about, scanning the different stones carefully, taking up one and another to inspect it more closely; but suddenly he stops. His attention is fixed. He has been seeking; now he has found. But what has he found? The very thing he had in mind as he sought? No, not exactly that; but something very much better. He was seeking "goodly pearls"; he has found a "pearl of great price," i. e., a gem of surpassing value. It is such a pearl as he did not expect to find. It far exceeded his highest hope. He did not know that there was such a pearl in existence. True, he has had a large

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experience in the pearl business, has seen many a superior gem, has informed himself regarding the famous pearls of commerce. But this pearl—ah, he has never seen its like, nor has he even read of such a one! Like the Kohinoor among diamonds, it was of more value than many “goodly” gems. Its possession will make him a rich man, rich beyond his fondest expectation.

Pause a moment to note the parallel. Could illustration be more perfect, more true to fact? Does it not truly reflect the experience of every earnest seeker after the Christly character? When the inquirer sets out on the pathway towards the heavenly kingdom his ideas of the highest good, of godliness, of Christlikeness, are meager enough. Perhaps he expects a great deal by comparison with what others expect. He realizes, it may be, that righteousness and truth and purity and love are good things, and he aims at their cultivation; but when, as a result of his earnestness and sincerity in seeking the best that he knows, he finds God and discovers the real meaning of holiness and infinite love, when the gospel unfolds before him the life and character of Jesus Christ, perfect, divine, the revelation surpasses his utmost thought. He may have been seeking goodly pearls; he has found the Pearl of Greatest Price, and the discovery amazes him. In contrast with that divine beauty how mean and worthless all other ideals become! The radiance streaming from Calvary’s cross makes earthly love seem weak and selfish, makes all partial service and sacrifice contemptible. And this is the unvarying experience of all who have sought the kingdom of God. They have sought the best things they knew, only to have their vision infinitely enlarged as they went, and the enlarged desire fully satisfied.

Take a single example. Jacob, sobered by fear and startled by a wondrous vision, begins to seek a higher life. But what are the goodly pearls that he expects to find? Protection from danger; prosperity on his jour-

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ney; success in business, with wealth and peace. Sordid enough is the purpose of his quest; but he is in earnest, and he seeks from God. What did he find? The goodly pearls he sought? Yes, he prospered; he was saved from death and danger; he was restored after many years to his old home in peace. All these blessings he found; but they were not all. He found truth, honesty, and later genuine sainthood—spiritual gems of the existence of which he had no conception in his youth. The experience of Jacob is not unique. It is the universal experience of those who seek God. At the outset motives and ideals are always imperfect, often wholly unworthy. But in the progress of the quest these are purified and exalted. The selfish query, "What shall we have?" gives place to the earnest question, "What can we do?" The terrified cry, "What must I do to be saved?" is transformed into the eager thought, "What can I do to save others?" And so the whole meaning and purpose of discipleship takes on a new glory with every advancing step.

Now comes the turning-point of the parable. Our wise merchant has sought and found. What next? Does he rush home to tell his wife and friends what a wonderful pearl he has seen? Does he devote the remainder of his life to glowing descriptions of this wonderful gem? That is what many spiritual seekers do. They get a glimpse of some heavenly glory and spend the rest of their days talking about it. Listen to the testimonies in our prayer-meetings or class-meetings. How many of them deal with first-hand spiritual experience? Only a few. Most persons merely repeat what they have heard from others, or talk of that which they have seen or have read about. The witness of personal experience is all too rare.

Not so with our merchant. He is not content with seeking and finding. These are of no advantage in themselves. They must be followed by *possession*. He is no

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richer for merely gazing upon this pearl and admiring it. Even the clearest and most adequate appreciation of its value confers no benefit so long as another owns it. He must make it his own.

If we have followed our guide thus far, we must also follow him here. Too many stop short of this third step. They seek and find, but they never possess. Like the rich young man in the Gospels, they are filled with admiration for the Christly character, they even worship its divine beauty; but that is all. Reverently, wistfully even, they study the character revealed in Jesus; but they never think of making that character their own.

“God’s everlasting love! What would we more?

Yes, one thing more. To know it ours indeed.

To add the conscious joy of full possession.”

This is all-important.

Failing to catch this point, we read our parable in vain. The merchant seeks, finds, determines to possess. But how? *“He went and sold all that he had.”* This is the climax of the parable. Everything that he owned must be turned into ready money that he may secure the coveted jewel. First, his stock of pearls, a rare collection, containing many a gem of unusual beauty and value that in times past has afforded him not a little satisfaction, is now offered for sale without reserve. After his pearls, his store, his home, his furniture, even his cherished heirlooms—every article that will bring money in return is freely offered. He knows that if he can obtain this priceless jewel he will be far richer than with all these things, and that he can repurchase all that are really of value.

A wise man he; and we may well take him for our teacher. This is what he says to us: “Part with all thou hast; part with it quickly; part with it gladly; nor waste a moment in foolish regret. The price of Christly character is complete self-surrender to God. The king-

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dom of heaven can be obtained only at the cost of all things else. Who withholds the smallest trifle can never know the meaning of full salvation, of complete sainthood."

"What! must I give up everything that I possess—my wealth, my business, my life?" Yes, *to God*. You must hold every dollar you own absolutely at his disposal, to be used precisely as he would have you use it. Your business you must surrender to him, to be given up if he wills, or, if he wills, to be carried on in a perfectly Christian fashion; and that means just as Jesus Christ would carry it on were he in your place, to be carried on for the same purpose for which Jesus carried on his work of preaching and healing and helping. You must submit every item of your life, your recreations, your pleasures, your ambitions, your desires, to the control of his will, to the clear light of his truth.

"Cannot I attain the Christly character without this complete surrender? Have not many men become saints who did not give up everything to God? Are there not many in the Christian Church who have never made such surrender?" Ah, yes, many disciples have not made the full surrender; but these have not found the Christly character. "Goodly pearls" you may obtain more cheaply. Church-membership costs little either in money or service. Respectability may be had for a song. A reputation for benevolence or spirituality or religious zeal and efficiency calls for only a part of the price. Even the title of "Saint" is scarcely more expensive than a doctor's degree from a bogus university. But the one "Pearl of great price," the genuine Christly character, that can be secured only by the willing sacrifice of everything else. Listen to the declaration of the Master himself: "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come

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after me, cannot be my disciple. . . . Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Study this parable in the light of those words.

Do not stay at this point, however. Our drama has yet one more act. After the selling, *buying*. "He went and sold all that he had, and bought it." All will agree with me that we can follow our merchant to this point, if we will. But here many will halt. They will say, "We cannot buy the Christly character. Salvation is not a matter of purchase. These things are the free gift of God." I reply, You can never obtain them in any other way than by purchase. "But did not Peter pronounce a scathing rebuke upon Simon Magus, because he sought to purchase the gift of God?" True; but why? Not because he tried to buy God's blessing, but because he offered too little for it. He wanted to purchase the divine power for a paltry sum of gold. Had he made his offer large enough it would have been gladly accepted. Had he made it large enough, had he offered himself with his money, had he surrendered his life and his all to the service of the Christ to be his alone and his forever, the bargain would have been concluded on the spot.

Not by the terms of this parable alone, but by the frequent use of mercantile terms in the Scriptures, and by the very titles of our sacred books which signify the Old and New Covenants, we are warranted in saying that there is a very important sense in which the kingdom of heaven can be—must be—purchased. To speak of a gift conveys a certain idea of capriciousness. It is something wholly independent of the will of the receiver. I must wait for a gift until the donor pleases to bestow it. But a purchase conforms to the laws of trade. I may buy what I will, when I will, the moment I am ready and willing to pay the price.

In this sense we may purchase the gifts of God. To

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every divine promise is affixed a definite and clear condition. We obtain the blessing only when the condition is fulfilled. Even the supreme blessing, the salvation of the immortal soul, the attainment of the perfect character, is offered on conditions as definite and as tangible as those upon which one may obtain a pearl from the jeweler. When one is ready to pay the price, he need not wait a moment for the blessing.

Have I not read aright the lesson of our Lord's parable? The cost of character, what is it? In figure, this: seeking, finding, selling, buying. In literal fact: earnest purpose, diligent search, complete self-surrender, glad and full possession. Withhold the price, keep back never so small a portion of it, and the pearl cannot be yours. Though you pray fervently and without ceasing, though you scatter your money broadcast in approved benevolence, though you are conspicuous and tireless in religious activity, though you delight in self-denial and sacrifice, all will be in vain. Tears and labors, fasts and vigils, are useless. But pay the price of willing self-surrender, freely, fully, and the Christly character shall be yours. Ignorant and lacking in gifts you may be, few and insignificant may be your opportunities for service; but in you the spirit and the life of the Christ will surely appear; and these will abundantly recompense you for all the cost. And thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Completion of Character

CHAPTER VIII

The Completion of Character

THE DRAG-NET

Matt. 13:47-50

Text.—“*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net.*”—Matt. 13:47

HOPE is the mainspring of intelligent effort. Hope is the fountain of courage, the seed germ of endless progress. In the presence of hope difficulties shrink and impossibilities vanish away. Open the door of hope before the weakest man, and a new sense of power thrills within him. He will no longer lie prone upon earth, but may soar aloft to the very heavens. Close the door upon the strongest and noblest and he will sink to the level of the brutes.

What has made the difference between the free, progressive American and the degenerate subject of Turkish misrule? Why is one intelligent, thrifty, advanced and ever advancing, while the other lives in the same barbarous, primitive fashion in which his ancestors lived centuries ago? The answer is contained in the single word “Hope.” Every child in our land, however poor, is born to an inheritance of hope. Whatever the circumstances of his birth, he knows that he may reasonably aspire to the highest achievements of wealth, social position or honor, and he also knows that if he attains to these no man will take them from him. He toils diligently and uncomplainingly, therefore, because he

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knows that the fruits of his toil will be his own. Day by day he rests in the assured and peaceful possession of what he has gained, while he looks forward to larger achievements in days to come.

By contrast, he who enters the world under an Oriental despotism can hope for little. He is hedged about by difficulties and discouragements; he is hampered by unjust customs and laws or want of laws. Toil hard as he may, he has no assurance of success or advancement; and if successful the fruits of his labors may be seized by an envious ruler. Any gain in knowledge or culture or wealth only makes him the target of suspicion and jealousy by those in power. Hence the one great incentive to progress is wanting.

What is the difference between Christian England and heathen Africa? Whence comes the moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race over the followers of Mohammed or Buddha? Again "Hope" is the key-word. Christianity is the religion of hope. The secret of the moral progress of Christendom is contained in that one verse from the epistle of John, "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. *And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*"

True, this declaration has been qualified and explained and doubted, until it has lost much of its force in the life of the Christian Church. Nevertheless it abides as a part of the eternal word of God, and always there are some who accept its truth and enter into the fulness of its blessing. Christliness is possible only to him who hopes to become Christlike. He alone proves himself a son of God who believes in his own real divinity. Heaven is the goal of the hopeful; the hopeless and despairing will never climb. The great Italian poet could find no motto more appropriate for the gate of hell than

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this: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here." He might have written, "Who abandons hope must enter here," for hopelessness will sink any soul to perdition. The material stagnation that follows from hopelessness is a trifle by comparison with the moral degradation springing from the same source. The hopeless man will not strive for spiritual advancement and enrichment any more than for material gain. His outward poverty and barbarism will be fitting types of the mental and moral paralysis that creeps slowly but surely over his inner life.

Is it strange, then, that Jesus, in his great discourse upon character building, should have touched at the close the spring of hope? Rather is it not most natural, just what we should expect? Of what use to paint in glowing colors the value and beauty of the heavenly character, unless there be added some assurance that such character is actually attainable; that at some time, either in this world or the next, it will surely be made perfect?

We listen to the parables of The Growing Seed, The Wheat and Tares, The Mustard Seed, and the rest, and in our hearts springs up the desire for Christliness. We recognize the exceeding beauty of the picture. We confess the glory and worth of the ideal. Were it possible we would possess this priceless Treasure, this Pearl of great price. In ourselves and in the world we would rejoice to see the kingdom of heaven triumphant. But thus far the note of triumph has not been sounded. The picture has been that of struggle and imperfection. Our only experience in spiritual things is an experience of warfare. We are distracted with conflicting motives and influences. And we naturally ask, "Is this state of things eternal? Is individual character to be won and maintained only by a perpetual struggle between good and evil? Is Christliness to exist in the world only at the cost of a ceaseless warfare with the hosts of darkness? Is the right to hold the balance of power forever by a slight and uncertain margin? And must all right-

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eousness whether of the individual or of the race be eternally imperfect?"

To answer such questions as these, Jesus spoke the parable of The Net Cast into the Sea. It is a necessary conclusion to the wonderful series of pictures which he had presented to that seaside audience. Without it the panorama would have little value or attractiveness. It would be shorn of its power for highest good. The Master has spoken of the Vitality of Character; the Conservation of Character; the Growth, Influence, Value, and Cost of Character. It now remains to sketch the Completion of the Christly Character. For such promise the heart yearns. In such assurance lies the germ of hope and imparts a new glow of beauty to all that goes before; and we feel that the entire discourse has a meaning hitherto unsuspected. Here, at last, we have found the needed counterpoise to the picture of The Wheat and the Tares; here the clearer light that shall make that riddle plain.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away." Clearly this is intended as a companion-piece to the parable of The Wheat and the Tares. Although the scenes are totally dissimilar, the underlying truths are closely related, as is manifest from our Lord's interpretation of the pictures. The difference is chiefly a matter of emphasis. Both parables treat of the development and completion of character, but the focus of the former parable is on the process of development, while that of the latter is on the attainment of completion. (Present toleration is the lesson of The Wheat and the Tares; final separation is the promise of The Drag-net.)

"Let both grow together" is the command regarding our treatment of evil in present conditions. Our business

is not to root up evil, but to give ourselves to the positive culture of the good, to the attainment and cultivation of righteousness. Yet, after all, this is temporary. We need not fear that, because we let it grow, the evil will remain forever to hamper us; for we have here the promise, "In the end of the world, the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire."

Do not be alarmed if I seem to depart from the traditional interpretation of this parable; for careful consideration may show the divergence to be more in seeming than in reality. In any case the traditional interpretation is by no means harmonious with itself or satisfactory to those who adopt it. It is common to define the net either as the Church gathering men out of the world, or as the course of divine Providence by which all men are at last gathered upon the shores of another world. By this method of interpretation the identity of the fisherman is very hard to determine. But the separation is supposed to represent the final judgment and the divine approval or condemnation of different classes of persons.

If, however, we bear in mind the fact that the kingdom of heaven is not the Church or any other collection or organization of men, but the Christly character, we shall see in the parable, not a complex and somewhat mixed drama of probation and judgment, but a simple picture of the development and maturity of character. And we shall see that the idea of maturity or completion occupies the prominent foreground, while the thought of development is made wholly secondary.

What are the net, the fisherman, the sea, the beach? It matters little how we define these details, or whether we define them at all. The significance of the picture lies not in one or another of them. It is rather the process as a whole, the casting, the gathering, the separating, as a continuous action, that is designed to repre-

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sent something with regard to the kingdom of heaven. And that something is a process attaining completion. In a sentence, it is a picture of *the completion of the Christly Character*.

Now, what specifically does the parable teach? This first, does it not?—that character in its beginnings, even the Christly character, is very complex. True character must begin with a mixture of good and evil; it must infold a diversity of tendencies and motives. It “is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of *every kind*.” Mere innocence, i. e., freedom from evil, is not character. Our first parents in the Garden of Eden were not holy. The babe in the cradle is not. Theirs is the mere unmoral innocence of the lambs that skip upon the hillsides or the kittens that play upon the floor. Righteousness is the result of battle and conquest. There is no righteousness that is not so attained. Even the Christ had his conflict with temptations, his wilderness battles with Satan, his trials with too friendly disciples and an enthusiastic populace. Were it otherwise he could never have been the world’s Saviour. Does not personal experience testify to the existence of this complex gathering in every heart? In the process of our moral development evil is always present with the good, sometimes conquering, sometimes conquered. Even in the most saintly life we may discover a variety of qualities as diverse as the fish in the net.

Oftentimes we think that we should be better off if there were no evil; but God has thought otherwise. Whatever we may conceive to be the origin of evil, of this we are certain, that God has seen fit to place us in the midst of it, and to leave us free to choose between the evil and the good. It may be that, as Emerson has said, evil is only “good in the making.” At all events we know that all moral strength, all true manhood and womanhood, grows out of the conflict with and triumph

over sin. The temptation which caused the fall of man was the only possible means of his rise from animalism to sainthood. But for the possibility of sin involved in the presence of evil there were no possibility of righteousness through the struggle with and victory over sin.

What is true in the development of individual character is also and equally true in the building up of character in the race. In fact, the moral growth of the race is identical in method with that of the individual; but the outlines are cast upon a larger surface. In the beginning we discover the greatest imaginable complexity of ideals. Even among those who are most earnest to know the truth and to fulfil the law of righteousness there is endless diversity in the notions that prevail concerning God, religion, government, marriage, and many other institutions that lie at the very foundations of human life. Over against every truth have appeared a thousand falsehoods or errors, and human progress has been achieved only by the comparison of the true and the false followed by the choice of the true.

In the second place, the parable brings out the fact that the development of character is towards simplicity or true unity. The child character is a compound of good and evil possibilities about evenly balanced. It is made up of diverse tendencies, none of which preponderates. It contains all potentialities for good and evil. But the character of mature manhood and womanhood is distinctly one or the other, good or bad. Whoever fails to manifest this positive ascendancy of the one over the other remains in a state of moral infancy. We may not witness the actual completion of the process in a single instance in this world. That is not necessary. But, so far as we are permitted to trace it, the tendency is plain, and its outcome easily foreseen. The angels, i. e., the divine agencies which surround and influence all human life, are perpetually separating the

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good from the ill. In the exercise of daily experience and the atmosphere of a careful Providence, one element of character increases while the other diminishes. It may be the good that grows; it may be the evil. That depends upon the individual. The messengers of God present continuous opportunities for highest service and attainment, each of which infolds a corresponding possibility of evil; the choice between these is a weight cast upon one side or the other of the scale. The original balance is never maintained. The mature character is never as perfectly complex as that of childhood.

The child nature may be fittingly compared to a chemical compound. Many and varied are the elements of which it is composed. The agencies by which character is molded are like the precipitant which the chemist introduces, and by means of which the compound is quickly separated into its constituent simples. Moral growth is a process of precipitation. It is the separation of moral elements.

Finally the parable contains a promise of the ultimate perfection of character. Whether we are permitted to see it in this world or not, the process which has already begun will go on to completion. The separation between good and evil will at some time be accomplished and the evil will be removed and destroyed.

The phrase, "in the end of the world," is not absolutely definite in its significance. It does not necessarily look forward to the time when this earth shall cease to exist as a habitable globe, or to the close of the racial history, but may refer to the consummation or end of the process of character building. Our attention is clearly not called in any definite manner to new conditions in another world, but rather to the certain result of conditions and activities which we may perceive in this world.

The angels of God, in the form of spiritual forces and laws, are even now separating the good from the evil.

On all sides we may behold them carefully preserving the good, while they visit the evil with torment and sorrow, or cast it wholly away. With what disciplines of repentance and remorse, it may be of suffering and of pain, is the sin burned out of the life of an Augustine or a Bunyan or a John Newton? But after the work is completed, their righteousness has "shone forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The goal of Christliness has been reached by men, and this has been the way to it.

But we have not yet heard the last word which our parable has for us. It is a picture of the growth and completion of God's kingdom in the individual soul. It is also a picture of the establishment of that kingdom *in the world*. For the moral and spiritual growth of each one of us is an accurate type of a similar growth in the race. In the world the development of character is from the complex to the simple. The spiritual evolution of mankind has ever been and is to-day a process of separation. It is accomplished through the attainment of ever clearer distinctions between right and wrong.

How complex and murky were the moral ideals of the early ages! Abraham, the saint of his times, was a polygamist and a freebooter. Moses, the inspired lawgiver, was an outlawed murderer. David, the matchless singer of the ages, was a cruel and superstitious ruler at best, not to speak of the specific crimes that lie at his door. Even when we come to the early Church, we find in the lives of those whom we call "saints" many false notions and low ideals. The prevailing methods and principles of the Christian leaders in the third and fourth centuries would shame those of the lowest and most godless politicians of our own time. The history of Christendom has been a course of gradual separation between good and evil, followed by the destruction of the evil.

By what fierce struggles has tyranny been overthrown

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and freedom secured! With what fires of sorrow and sacrifice was the sin of slavery burned out of our own national life, after the light of gospel truth had been shining for more than eighteen centuries! At what cost of social unrest and danger are we to-day sloughing off the sins of greed and selfishness from our commerce and our society! Every day our moral vision grows clearer. Every day we discover the wrong in customs and institutions and habits that were formerly considered right. The liquor traffic, for example, which is now relegated to the low and criminal classes, less than a century ago was deemed fit for Christian men. The lottery, which has been countenanced by government patronage within the brief limits of our own national history, is to-day banished from the country. Dr. John Watson says, "To-day a millionaire is respected; there are signs that in future years a man leaving a huge fortune will be thought a semi-criminal."

Thus the Spirit of God is slowly but surely separating the evil from the good among men, and is destroying the evil. The kingdom of heaven is coming on earth, however we may be tempted to doubt it at times. He studies history to little advantage who cannot find numberless tokens of the moral and spiritual advance of mankind under the influence of the gospel. We frequently hear Christians bemoaning the degeneracy of the Church in the present generation, and the decadence of the spiritual life of to-day by contrast with that of our fathers and grandfathers. A complete and permanent cure for such pessimism would result from the study of Church life and history in New England from the days of the Puritans to the present. The steady and marvelous development of both ideals and practise, the growth of toleration and true beneficence, to say nothing of the great advance in moral and spiritual life, give the lie to that most meaningless of phrases, "the good old times."

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Many sins have been removed and destroyed already. We may still hear the weeping and gnashing of teeth of some that are even now in the fire. Others are but dimly distinguishable from the good, and their destruction is yet to come. Not far distant is the time when the sin of war will no longer be a blot upon the pages of Christian history. It may be that you and I will yet be called upon to give up many a practise which we, and all other men, now consider perfectly righteous and innocent. If we are not prepared to do this when the clearer revelation shall dawn, we have no right to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

If, now, I have rightly interpreted this parable of The Drag-net, it is not so much a note of warning as of encouragement. It is designed to kindle hope rather than to excite fear. Not judgment and penalty, but freedom and joy through ultimate triumph is its central thought. As such is it not a revelation that comes very close to every one of our lives, and that meets a universal need in every aspiring soul?

We stand face to face with a host of evils. As we strive for saintly character we are sometimes tempted to give over the struggle in despair. Christliness seems utterly unattainable. "The good which we would we do not: but the evil which we would not, that we practise," is the true expression of our common experience. And when, turning from ourselves to others, we seek to bring the Christly character into the world about us, when we aim at some manifest good for our fellow men and find our efforts unappreciated, yes, thwarted, by those whom we would help and save, we are tempted to believe that the world is growing worse instead of better, and that there is no such thing as moral completeness or perfection.

The saintly Faber has voiced the feelings of numberless disciples in the familiar lines,

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"Oh, it is hard to work for God,
To rise and take his part
Upon this battle-field of earth,
And not sometimes lose heart!

* * * * *

Ill masters good; good seems to change
To ill with greatest ease;
And, worst of all, the good with good
Is at cross-purposes."

Many others can echo the lines of Tennyson,—

"Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

* * * * *

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope."

Yes, our perplexity is often deep, our trust faint indeed. How can the Christly character be maintained in the midst of so much sin? How can the kingdom of heaven be won when the powers of evil are so strong and so wise and so persistent? So we question. And there comes to us across the centuries this parable with its message of hope and promise. Like a guiding star it beckons us onward with its ceaseless assurance, "The good you seek shall triumph; the evil you hate shall some time be destroyed. You shall not labor nor strive in vain. The Christly character, the perfect righteousness shall be yours; it shall at last be the character of the race. 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'!"

Character an Interpreter of Truth

CHAPTER IX

Character an Interpreter of Truth

THE HOUSEHOLDER AND HIS TREASURE

Matt. 13:52

Text.—“*Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*”—Matt. 13:52

“Truth is one,
And in all lands beneath the sun,
Whoso hath eyes to see, may see
The tokens of its unity.”

AH yes, whoso hath eyes to see! But, alas, all have not eyes; or having eyes, see not. Not only do many fail to discern the unity of truth, but they fail to discover even the most transparent meaning of truth. For whoever would see the real meaning in the simplest truth must have not eyes alone, but a mind behind the eyes, and behind that a soul.

I know that the popular analysis resolves sight into three prime factors—eyes to look, an object to look at, and light to transmute looking into seeing; but this analysis is incomplete unless we include in our thought of the eye all that goes with it of mind and soul to affect its working. The eagle from his rocky eyrie or the wild mountain goat of the Alps looks out over magnificent peaks and crags with eyes of extraordinary visual power; but what is the seeing of either of these by comparison with that of a man, especially if that man

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be an artist? His eye may be dim and his vision imperfect, yet with whatsoever defects and limitations of vision, he sees more at a single glance from some lofty vantage-point than has been seen by all the wild creatures since time began; for behind his eye is a mind.

Carry the thought a step further. The visions or seeings of different men differ one from another no less widely than the vision of a man differs from that of an animal. One man has no eye for symmetry of form; another cannot distinguish beauty of coloring. One will see more in a square mile of travel than another will discover while exploring a continent. For one a single blossom contains marvels which his neighbor would not find in the whole vegetable creation. Here is a man who sees no beauty in a landscape, no grandeur in the ocean, no glory in the mountains, mist-veiled and blue. There in his brother to whom these sights bring a thrill of delight or a profound sense of awe.

We also perceive a like diversity in the outlook upon life. There are eyes that see in life only a dull and wearisome necessity, and in men a most uninteresting race of beings not far removed from the apes. To other eyes every day of life brings its fresh inspiration and delight, and every new acquaintance is a repository of unknown possibilities. A Carlyle looks out over the English nation and mutters, "Forty million people, *mostly fools!*" A Gregory, seeing several fair-haired Saxon youths in the Roman slave-market and being told that they were called "*Angles,*" says, "Call them rather '*Angels,*'" and gives himself no rest till he has assured the evangelization of Britain.

How shall we account for this diversity in the seeing of different men? Clearly it is not due to difference in the physical eye; nor is it wholly in the mental vision. Variations of intellectual power or keenness do not explain all the diversities of result, for the brightest minds often fail to discover things which reveal themselves in-

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stantly to minds of duller mold. If, then, the physical and the mental organs are insufficient to solve this riddle of human seeing, we must look deeper than these; we must take into account the moral and spiritual elements of our being. In a word, character must be recognized as a significant factor in vision. And if this be true of literal seeing, the seeing that has to do with the material universe and with the outward life of man, how much more true is it of that seeing which deals with the immaterial and the abstract—with the perception of truth!

Now this is, if I mistake not, precisely the thought that Jesus seeks to unfold in the parable of The Householder and His Treasure. The parable has been sadly neglected, and probably few readers of Scripture think of it as a parable at all. It has been passed over in silence by the leading expositors, for some unexplained reason, and the example thus set has been followed almost universally by the host of minor exegetes. Nevertheless we have here a true parable and one that is directly in line with the others recorded in the same chapter. More than this, it is closely interwoven with the rest and its message is essential to the completeness of the Master's thought.

Stripped of metaphor and translated into the language of common life, the suggestion of the parable may be expressed in a single phrase: *Christly character a necessary factor in the interpretation of divine truth.*

The two figures that present themselves to us for comparison are *a scribe and a householder*. The former is described as "a scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven," that is to say, "Every teacher or student of divine truth who diligently cultivates the Christly character." Many a student and teacher of truth brings to his work his intellect alone. Not a few Bible students even rely implicitly and solely upon grammar, lexicon, concordance and commentary for the in-

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terpretation of its message. They enter upon their task equipped with all the learning of the schools, and consider that sufficient for the discovery of all that the Bible contains. Others there are who recognize the value of these things, but recognize also the fact that in themselves they are not adequate for the complete interpretation of the divine message. That requires a devout approach and a spiritual insight. Scholarship as it is commonly defined must be reenforced by character; learning must be subordinated to spirit; mind must be servant of soul. And it is this latter class, unfortunately a class that is always in the minority even among Christian students, whom Jesus represents as scribes who have been made disciples to the kingdom of heaven. They are the men who seek not merely the body of truth, i. e., the bare facts that may be classified and tabulated, but the very soul of truth, truth that applies to life and conduct, and that makes for the perfection of character.

The second figure in the comparison is a *householder* "who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." Do you catch the meaning of the similitude? This, is it not? In whatever field such a student works he will continually discover new truths and new meanings in old truths. Whether he investigate the revelation of God in nature or study the record of his doings upon the written page, he will daily reap a harvest of fresh and helpful thought. Though poorly equipped with the learning of the schools, his findings will be immeasurably richer than the findings of his brother who brings to his task the best mental training and talent without the Christly character.

We may not be able to explain the fact, but fact it is none the less, that the universe has always yielded its secrets to Christly men or to men who are striving for Christliness, while it has withheld them from the ungodly. Even in a material sense this is true. The vast material

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resources of the world have remained hidden till men have sought them in the spirit of the Christ. All great inventions and discoveries have come to Christian nations. The discoveries of pagan nations are trifles beside them. Did the pagan Chinese invent printing? No! The possibilities and methods of printing presented themselves to the Chinese, but they were unable to grasp them in any practical fashion. It was left for a Christian Gutenberg to *invent* the printing-press and give it to the world. Did heathen Norsemen discover America? No! They came to America, stumbled upon it as it were, and returned to their homes no wiser than they came. The new continent still lay hidden from the eyes of men till a Christian Columbus found it and knew what he had found. For heathen nations the earth contained its stores of coal, its rich treasures of power, its abundant resources of food supply; but only Christian peoples have been able in any complete manner to bring forth and interpret and utilize these. Men talk about "the lost arts" of antiquity; but magnify those lost arts as you please, and they are a mere cipher by contrast with the arts that the ancients never found.

Throughout the ages the rocks have told their silent story of creation and progress, and in all lands the ruins and the monuments of the past have been exposed to the eyes of men; yet the heathen have no science of geology or archeology. These are the developments of Christian civilization. For centuries uncounted the heathen have tried to read the revelation that shines upon the scroll of the heavens, and what have they made of it? Only a senseless and utterly misleading superstition known as astrology. Studying the same limitless page, the Christian world has seen unfolded there the science of astronomy through whose voice, as never before, "the heavens declare the glory of God." Instead of a jumble of mysterious and causeless influences,

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our Newtons and Proctors and Keplers have discovered a marvelous system of laws and a unity of design and operation manifesting themselves in every part of the infinite universe and testifying to the infinite wisdom and power of the Creator. From this treasure-house many things new are being brought forth year after year.

Nor is it otherwise in the study of life. How many shepherds, for example, from earliest times have been familiar with all the numerous duties and relations of the shepherd life and have found in them only commonplace drudgery and wearisome labor! But a godly David looks upon that life with an eye made keen by the search for true and noble character, and it glistens with a marvelous message of the love and care of God. As a result the world is enriched by the possession of a Shepherd Psalm. The Christ looks upon the same page of life and it unfolds to him the matchless parable of The Lost Sheep and the simile of The Good Shepherd. Thoughtless multitudes attend the Greek games and see in them merely exhibitions of physical skill or endurance, the passing enjoyment of an hour often brutalizing in its influence and degrading in its associations. A devout Paul watches them, and for him they take on a deeper meaning as wrestler and racer, and, including even the cruel gladiator, become suggestive types of Christian discipleship and noblest service.

Best of all illustrations of this truth is found in the chapter in which our parable occurs. Here is not one picture but a series of pictures drawn from the most commonplace walks and occupations of life, the husbandman in the field, the housewife in the kitchen, the merchantman in the market-place, the fisherman on the lake. What had these for the multitude but suggestions of toil and strife and greed and worldliness? But to the mind of the Christ they spoke deathless messages of truth, and interpreted by him they were forever transformed into types of highest living. What wonders of

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new thought were brought forth from very old things that day by the seaside! For behind the eyes that looked upon these things, behind the intellect that comprehended their facts and relations, was a perfect character, a divine purpose that could appreciate their larger possibilities and their deeper meanings and could bring these out in such manner that others could see them also.

The Christly character, then, is the supreme requisite for the interpretation of God's truth as revealed in nature. It is Godlikeness that, more than anything else, enables us to think God's thoughts after him, so that we can understand his workings in the material universe and use his laws and forces for our own highest good. It is character, also, that enables us rightly to interpret the meaning of life and to discover in the experiences and activities of every day the manifestations of God's presence and the revelations of his will.

Nor is this all. Another application of the same truth remains. Not only is the Christly character necessary to the complete interpretation of God's revelation in nature and in life, it is equally necessary to a clear and worthy interpretation of God's *written* message. Without that character the spoken word and the written record are alike mysterious and without meaning. We call the Bible God's Book, and we study it to learn his will and to bring ourselves into harmony with his Spirit and life; but it makes a vast difference how we study the Book, and with what equipment we approach its pages. Many have searched the Scriptures long and earnestly in vain. To them the pages yielded no fruit of enlightenment or strength or spiritual growth. The Book is sealed to their eyes. They cannot discover its message. So was it with the Pharisees of our Lord's time. Though familiar with every part of their Scriptures, they were strangely blind to the truths which those Scriptures taught in the plainest manner. To others the Book is a mine of spiritual treasure, a perennial fountain of

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spiritual light and inspiration. What is the difference? Is it a matter of intellect alone? Clearly not; for not a few of those who find nothing in the Bible are men and women of exceptional intellectual power and cultivation. The Pharisees and the scribes were the scholars of their age; the Paines and Voltaires and Ingersolls of later times have often been men of brilliant intellectual gifts. What then? It is a question of character and spirit. Even God's Word is voiceless to the godless soul, and speaks only in riddles or whispers to him who lacks the Christly purpose in his study.

The present age is an age of intellectualism. We magnify the value of scholarship in religion as in all things else, and rightly so. Careful study and mental acumen with thorough training are matters of no trifling importance; yet does not the Bible or any similar book yield its most precious truths in response to the demands of scholarship alone. Dwight L. Moody, the unlearned evangelist of the nineteenth century, and many others even less scholarly than he, have brought forth from the Bible treasures of spiritual truth far richer than have been discovered by the profoundest students of our time. Why? Because they brought to the study of the Word a devout spirit and a character ever reaching upward toward the divine. He who would find the most and best in his Bible must read it not merely in the light of grammar and lexicon and commentary, but on his knees with a prayer upon his lips and a devout purpose in his heart to seek the kingdom of heaven. The Christly character and that alone can unlock the profoundest secrets of God's Book. Truly "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."

Do not misunderstand me. I have no sympathy with the outcry of narrow minds against modern scholarship. Not for a moment would I question the value of the most thorough critical study of the Bible; for the critics have done priceless service for the world. Neverthe-

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less I assert that learning is subordinate to character in the interpretation of truth. It is imperative that we bring to our study all the learning possible; but if we cannot have both learning and Christly character, then by all means let us have character. As a leading thinker recently said, "Scholarship is important, the scientific methods are of inestimable value, but spiritual power and a consciousness of the presence of God are absolutely vital." Do we not all of us appreciate the value of keen and perfect physical vision? Nevertheless we know that defective vision with a keen mind will see more than the keenest vision with a dull mind. Even so a devout and godly soul with little learning will interpret God more surely in word or work than the keenest intellect without such a character. A Wesley or a Kitto will find more truth and more helpful truth than a Strauss and a Rousseau; and some simple-minded old woman will discover rare gems that have eluded the search of the whole Tübingen school.

One more suggestion our parable offers us. It is this: The disciple of the kingdom may expect to make continually progressive discoveries in the realm of divine truth. The significance of any revelation will not be exhausted by a single interpretation. Every new reading will bring out its new message harmonizing with and filling out the old. The truth discovered yesterday will have a larger meaning to-day, or it may even be eclipsed by a wholly fresh truth. So life will be a continuous panorama and its meaning will unfold in unexpected ways. The Book, too, will speak its new messages. Come to the Bible with the intellect alone, and it speaks ever one and the same truth. There is no progress, no growth. Come to it with the "hunger and thirst for righteousness" that is implied in the Christly character, and the old Book will glow with new truth at every advancing step. What it spoke yesterday will not be less true to-day, but it will be less complete, less

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satisfying. The old parables read hundreds of times will contribute each time something new for life and thought. The most familiar and hackneyed passages will never become dull or worthless, because they will reveal new meanings. That is why the Bible has retained its freshness through the passing centuries. It is the power of a growing Christliness in individuals and in the Christian Church making ever new applications of the old teachings. In some sense the twentieth century interpretation of the gospel may be no better than that of the tenth century, but it is more perfectly adapted to the needs of the twentieth century in its life and thought.

How fittingly this parable concludes the discourse by the sea! At the beginning of that discourse Jesus had appealed to his hearers to attend to what he should say, that his words might not fail to produce their due impression upon their minds. Now he appeals to them to aim at the heavenly character as the essential condition of understanding his words in their largest significance. It is well to study truth diligently, to be attentive, alert, earnest; but unless to this is added a genuine aspiration toward that which is highest in character and life, the effort and the study will not yield their richest fruit.

Is there any danger that we shall be too scholarly in our approach to God? Never! That is not the danger, but that our scholarship shall become too self-sufficient, that intellect shall arrogate to itself the supreme place that belongs only to character. Enthroned Christ in the heart, be reverent, humble, devout, then welcome learning, welcome science, welcome art, invention, discovery, and all other acquisitions of modern progress; for they will thus become effective instruments for the interpretation of God's message to mankind.

The true attitude of all Christian scholarship has been

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graphically presented to us by Whittier. You remember the lines:—

“On the isle of Penikese,
Ringed about by sapphire seas,
Fanned by breezes salt and cool,
Stood the Master with his school.

Said the Master to the youth:
We have come in search of truth,
Trying with uncertain key
Door by door of mystery.

Of our weakness made aware,
On the threshold of our task
Let us light and guidance ask,
Let us pause in silent prayer!”

Come to the study of God's revelation in this spirit, and every instrumentality you employ shall be potent for discovery and interpretation. So shall all doors of mystery be unlocked, and to you shall open the secrets of divinest truth and you shall enrich many souls as you enrich your own.

The Equation of Character

CHAPTER X

The Equation of Character

THE VINEYARD LABORERS

Matt. 20:1-16

Text.—“*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man . . . who went out . . . to hire laborers into his vineyard.*”—Matt. 20:1

HUMAN life is a common fraction. Opportunity is its denominator; service is its numerator; and character or destiny is the quotient, the value of the fraction.

In every spiritual fraction God writes down the denominator—opportunity, talent, privilege; all these are divine gifts. Then he leaves man to write the numerator—service, achievement, devotion; and to work out the result in personal worth and destiny. The common complaint charges God with writing the denominator too small. We murmur that our opportunities are few, our privileges scanty. Jealous of the larger denominators of other lives, we often fail to write into our own any numerator of service, and so the fraction of our lives is worthless.

A little study of simple arithmetic ought to be a permanent cure for this form of jealousy and an inspiration to hopeful and grateful service. You recall the old formula:—“To increase a fraction, multiply the numerator or divide the denominator. To decrease a fraction, multiply the denominator or divide the numerator.” That is to say, the larger the denominator, the smaller the fraction. Why, then, should you murmur at

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the smallness of your gifts and opportunities, since larger opportunities would make your life smaller unless you write over them the larger numerator of increasingly diligent and faithful service?

The man with ten talents must divide every service and every attainment by ten to get its real value; the man with five talents must reckon continually by five, whereas the man with only one talent may estimate every service at its full value, since dividing by unity leaves the numerator undiminished.

The spiritual or moral value of every life, therefore, may be expressed in the form of an arithmetical equation as follows:—

$$\text{CHARACTER} = \frac{\text{Service}}{\text{Opportunity}}$$

And this may well be called—*The Equation of Character*.

In this equation is embodied precisely the truth which our Lord illustrates and enforces in the parable of The Vineyard Laborers. Here as everywhere else in the New Testament the phrase “kingdom of heaven” signifies the heavenly life in the soul and in the race, the Christly character that brings present righteousness and peace and joy, and that enfolds within itself our future destiny, salvation and the life eternal, as the bud enfolds the rose. It is a phrase that gathers up and expresses in concisest form all the manifold results and outcomes of our life from whatever standpoint we may view them. The parable represents to us one of the great principles by which these are wrought out. Briefly stated, it says to us, “The result of your life and mine is not determined solely by our opportunities and privileges and favoring circumstances, which are the gifts of God. Nor, on the other hand, can it be estimated by our achievements alone, by the things which we accomplish and acquire through our human effort. Rather is that result meas-

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ured by the ratio between the divine gift and the human service." Not the multitude nor the magnitude of our opportunities, but the use we make of such opportunities as we have, whether small or great, whether many or few, is the test of our worth, the measure of our reward.

Studying the parable in detail, it falls naturally into three divisions, representing successively the three elements of our spiritual equation and leading us step by step to its divine solution.

The first division consists of two verses, which tell us how a certain man went out one morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. It is a simple picture of human life in which the key-note is *Service*. And its interpretation is equally simple. Listen to its message.

Character is attained only by means of service. Salvation comes only through service. Spiritual rewards or spiritual achievements involve spiritual service. Without service there is no true life either physical or spiritual. The divine spark is implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit; but it must be nourished, fanned to a flame, made to glow with a continual heat, by our own effort in behalf of others. This is a truth that runs all through the New Testament.

You remember how the apostle Peter expresses this eternal relation between opportunity, service and salvation: "Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (there is opportunity; it must be followed by service), "for this very cause, adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge," etc. (And the reward is assured.) "For thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And St. Paul puts the same thought in his epistle to the Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (service obtaining the reward), "for it is God who work-

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eth in you" (i. e., it is God that gives the opportunity to work).

Salvation, in the largest sense of the word, as a complete restoration of the divine character, can be enjoyed only when we work together with God. It is God working in us to create that new spiritual life which we must work out or manifest in godly service. It is God imparting to us the needful power which we must use diligently in adding to faith virtue and knowledge and temperance and patience and all the other graces and virtues if we would obtain an entrance into the eternal kingdom of the Christly character. Unless we are willing thus to work with God, we shall pray in vain for our own salvation.

"Hope not the cure of sin till self is dead:
Forget it in love's service, and the debt
Thou canst not pay, the angels shall forget:
Heaven's gate is shut to him who comes alone;
Save thou a soul, and it shall save thine own."

Turn now to the second division of the parable. Its key-word is *Opportunity*. It includes five verses, and tells us how the householder went out again and again during the day into the market-place to hire more laborers, repeating his calls even until the eleventh hour. Like the first, this scene presents no extraordinary features. In every detail it is as true to life as the scene which goes before, and its meaning is equally plain.

When we are ready for service, then comes the opportunity for service. Each time the householder goes forth, he employs *all* whom he finds, and he goes till the very last hour of the day. Note, in this connection, two facts. First, the men who are employed are *in the market-place*. Second, they are *standing*. That is, they are in the right place and in the right attitude. Both facts indicate readiness for service. The house-

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holder does not search the streets, he does not approach those who are sitting about the bazaars or loafing on the street corners.

These facts are suggestive. In our land to-day there is a vast army of men and women out of employment, many of whom claim to be looking for work and are often heard complaining because no work comes to them. Yet very often their appearance and attitude do not indicate real readiness for work, and they are not found in the places where work seeks for workers. As a matter of fact they are not ready for work. They wish for the rewards of labor, but for labor itself they have no relish.

These have their counterpart in the Church of Christ. Are not we ourselves actuated many times by their spirit? How often do we pray for the rewards of service, for spiritual growth and enlargement and joy, and all the while we carefully avoid the market-place whenever the Lord or his stewards are there seeking for laborers in the vineyard! We complain of spiritual poverty and leanness, and when some needed but not wholly agreeable work is presented to us we hold back and refuse to undertake it.

Do you feel that your life is wanting in opportunity to do God's work and to share in his rewards? Then let the Lord find you in the market-place, standing, when he comes for workers and he will surely call you to service. In other words, be ready, alert, willing to take whatever chance be given you, and you will not long remain in idleness.

Is not this picture full of encouragement? Perhaps you are conscious that many precious hours of your day have flown. You were not in the market-place at dawn. It may be that the third hour is past, and also the sixth. Thank God the ninth hour or the eleventh still remains! Do not despair. The Lord will come again if you are even now ready for him. Some

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opportunity of service may still be yours. Never did the Lord of the vineyard visit the market-place so frequently, never did he call so persistently for laborers as now. And in no land is the call so imperative as ours. The harvest is waiting. Work abounds for all who are ready and willing. Hear the clarion call:

“We are living, we are dwelling,
In a grand and awful time,
In an age on ages telling;
To be living is sublime.
Oh, let all the soul within you
For the truth’s sake go abroad.
Strike! let every nerve and sinew
Tell on ages, tell for God!”

Not a disciple need remain one moment in idleness. Could any truth be more encouraging?

But there is also another side. Remember—the night cometh! How the glorious day rushes by! With what terrible distinctness the clock strikes off the hours! It is the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, the eleventh—and *the night cometh!* Opportunity is giving place to fate. Privilege congeals into destiny. Idleness means loss of opportunity, loss of privilege, loss of power, and at last death. Yes, **THE NIGHT COMETH!**

A single scene remains. Our story reveals a third division comprising nine verses; and this is the picture which these verses present to us. The busy day has at length drawn to its close. The shadows of evening begin to fall over the earth and toil must cease. Again the householder calls the laborers, this time not to service but to reward. Bidding his steward pay them in turn, beginning with the latest comers, he pays them all alike, a penny to each man. A fair and full day’s wage paid even to men who had worked but a single hour. Seeing this, the first comers grumble because

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they have received no more than those who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour. What says the householder? "Did ye not agree with me for a penny? Take thy due and depart. May I not do as I please with mine own?"

The essential thought of this scene is *Reward*, which reward in the spiritual world we may translate by the word Character or Salvation or Eternal Life, according to the point of view from which we consider it.

I have called attention to the fact that the action portrayed in the two preceding sections of the parable was in no way out of the ordinary. Not so with this scene. The conduct of the employer in this final settlement is more than unusual. It is extremely unlikely and unnatural. It sets at naught all our commonly accepted notions of thrift and justice. It is wholly outside the science of economics as taught in our schools and as applied in the every-day relations of capital and labor. It can only be explained as an act of good-natured caprice on the part of the householder. Yet, arbitrary though it be from the standpoint of our imperfect and limited human relations, I think that we can see in it a representation of that which in the perfect conditions of the spiritual life is neither arbitrary nor unjust, nay, rather of that which is infinitely just and fair. In any case the interpretation is unavoidable: God pays his servants, not by the day nor by the piece, but by diligence and purpose. The spirit of service is the basis of reward. Quality is more than quantity, and faithfulness is more than time.

Now I venture to assert that this method of reckoning is not in flat contradiction to the highest economic wisdom, however far removed it may be from our common and even necessary practise in this earthly life. In so far as the action of this householder was arbitrary, a simple doing "what I will with mine own," it fails to represent the spirit and action of God in his dealings with

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men. Grace does not mean good-natured caprice. It does not mean unreasoning benevolence. It does not mean a careless disregard of law and reliable sequence in the relations between God and man. Rather does it presuppose the strictest justice in a perfectly fair and equitable system. Grace is not the foil of law; it is an essential factor in the working of perfect law.

The first and most inalienable right of every man is the right of opportunity. The world does not owe every man a living, as so many modern would-be economists declare; but the world does owe to every man a fair chance to earn a living. Until this chance is given, society has no claim on any man. But when the opportunity has been given, the world justly demands that each shall use it to make his own living and to enrich society. Even so God owes to every human being whom he has created the opportunity to attain the Christlike character, to work out his own salvation. But when the opportunity has been given it becomes each man's duty to translate the opportunity into service and through service into character.

When, therefore, Jesus says, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first," he does not mean to tell us that the principles and methods of the heavenly life are utterly at variance with those operating in the present state of existence, and that hereafter we shall be judged and rewarded by standards of which we now know nothing. Rather does he mean that the principles of righteousness, which are often hindered and perverted in their working by the imperfections of human society and the limitations of human knowledge, will work out their results perfectly in the unclouded light of the heavenly kingdom, and so will correct many an error of present judgment and action. Every change will be a change of correction, not of subversion. Motive and spirit will be clearly revealed and will have their proper place

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in the account, and the adjustments will be made in the light of omniscience.

It is one of the great injustices, growing out of the present imperfection of our human society and the unavoidable limitations of our human life, that many who are among the most faithful and diligent of earth's toilers receive but scant reward for their toil because of their small opportunities, while others with larger opportunities which they have used far less faithfully secure greatest returns. In fact, many who do not toil at all enjoy a rich inheritance which has come to them from others or live a life that is really parasitic. In a perfectly just and wise social system the highest awards would always go to the most faithful and diligent toilers, to those who made the most of their opportunities whether those opportunities be great or small.

This is the principle and the practise in God's kingdom. It is the rule that is working itself out both in the present life and in the life to come in relation to the really vital matters. To whom little is given, of him little is required, but to whom God commits much, of him he requires the more. The thief on the cross, embracing the first opportunity that had come to him to seek Christ's mercy, is welcomed to Paradise just as heartily as the saint who has built up a noble and respected character out of the superior opportunities of half a century.

"She hath done what she could," is the expression of supreme merit in the Gospel. It is not, "She hath done some great thing," "She hath achieved great success or fame," "She hath performed some extraordinary act of beneficence or kindness," but "*what she could.*" Opportunity used to the full, that is perfection, that calls forth the divine approval and secures the eternal reward.

I repeat, this is the law that governs in the kingdom of heaven. It is the law which will be perfectly re-

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vealed in all things hereafter, and it is the law which reveals itself in all vital matters here and now. The sin and weakness of men may frustrate its working in material things. There may be injustice and inequality in the material rewards which men receive for their toil, but in spiritual things there is no such interference. In the matter of character-building the law works out its results unerringly. Thus step by step we have been led back to the thought with which we set out, viz., that character equals service divided by opportunity.

This parable never touched more closely upon human life than it does at the present time. It is a true picture of every life in our land. This is a time of unparalleled opportunity. Whether we appreciate the fact or not, God is coming again and again to every one of us with his invitations to labor in the vineyard. He is writing in every one of our lives the denominator of opportunity and he is writing it large. To us he leaves the task of putting over it our numerator of service. Did it ever occur to you that these privileges and blessings which our age and circumstances bring to us will only leave us the worse unless we make worthy use of them? A rich inheritance or the endowment of unusual talent is no reason for idleness or ease. Rather should these gifts spur us to more tireless endeavor. "For this very cause," says the apostle Peter, "adding on your part all diligence." The poor man may afford to live in idleness, the rich man never. The gift of God that is not a spur to service becomes transformed into a snare of Satan. The danger of it is in direct proportion to its greatness.

The passing centuries have added a hundredfold to the significance of the householder's question, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" In this world, where there is so much work to be done, where there are such boundless opportunities and possibilities for every life,

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where all labor reaps so rich a reward, the crime of crimes is idleness. "Woe to them that are at ease," saith the Lord. Yet even the Christian Church is almost hopelessly at ease. Christian society abounds in idlers. Multitudes of disciples are complacently gaging their claims to the reward of righteousness by what others have done for them rather than by anything that they have done for others. They take foolish and fatal pride in the fact that the fraction of their lives has a large denominator.

To-day the Lord is calling for laborers. In every vineyard he wants them. The harvest waits. He is calling now. Every call means duty, but it means more. It means opportunity, it means privilege; the salvation of immortal souls is bound up in every call. Then—

"Up, and be doing! The time is brief,
And life is frail as an autumn leaf.
The day is bright and the sun is high,
Ere long 'twill fade from the glowing sky;
The harvest is white, and the fields are wide,
And thou at thine ease may'st not abide.
The reapers are few and far between,
And Death is abroad with his sickle keen.
Go forth and labor! A crown awaits
The faithful servant at heaven's high gates.
Work with thy might ere the day of grace
Is spent, ere the night steals on apace.
The Master has given his pledge divine,
'Who winneth souls, like the stars shall shine'."

Forgiveness a Factor in Character Building

CHAPTER XI

Forgiveness a Factor in Character Building

THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matt. 18:21-35

Text.—“*So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you.*”—Matt. 18:35

WHAT a picture of infinite vindictiveness these words present! Here is the character of God, the heavenly Father, painted in all the lurid colorings of revenge and fiery indignation. The flames of divine wrath, kindled by the ungrateful conduct of man, break forth to torment and consume a soul that has already been forgiven, but has failed to manifest the fruits of forgiveness. Such is the first impression made upon our minds as we read the closing words of our parable. Too often this is the impression that remains with us as the lesson which our Lord intended to teach.)

A more careful study of the parable, however, discovers that it is in reality a picture of divinest love, a love that is not satisfied with anything less than the complete blessedness of all God's children, a love that works inexorably in order that it may work perfectly and beneficently. True, it is a picture of the operation of divine law in human life; but it is not less emphatically a picture of divine grace. Not loveless wrath, even at the last, but loving severity that strives ever and only for the happiness of its object.

This parable of The Unforgiving Servant is spoken

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by the Master to enforce and illustrate his reply to a question of Peter. "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" asks the ever-ready spokesman of the apostles. Then, to show his own generosity and kindliness of spirit, he adds, "Until seven times?" Surely that were a wondrous display of grace that would forgive a wrong seven times repeated; and I doubt not that Peter expected the hearty endorsement of Jesus. Imagine his surprise, therefore, when the reply comes back, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, *Until seventy times seven.*" That is to say, "Why, Peter, the spirit of forgiveness knows no limit; it can never be exhausted."

Imagine now the effect of these words upon Peter and his brother apostles. Here was a new law of forgiveness, simple enough so far as its mere statement was concerned, but utterly incomprehensible, from their point of view, in its application. It seemed unreasonable, arbitrary. To their minds forgiveness was at once a very gracious and a very difficult act; and its continual repetition seemed to contradict plainest reason. On the one hand, they felt that it was more than could justly be expected of any man; on the other, they considered such boundless grace as wholly useless, if not positively wrong. They are not a few even in our own day who believe that forgiveness must have a limit if all law and order are not to be stultified.

You see then why Jesus expands his answer into a parable. He wishes to put the whole question of sin and forgiveness in a new light, to show the relative insignificance of wrongs suffered by comparison with wrongs done, and to make very clear the reflex influence of the spirit of forgiveness upon personal character. For this purpose he tells a simple story of ruin brought about by the spirit of unforgiveness.

The salient points of the parable are evident to the most casual reader. Two contrasts stand out clearly.

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They are, (a) a contrast of condition, and (b) a contrast of action.

Note first the contrast of condition. Here are two servants, both in debt; but in the one case the debt is "ten thousand talents" and "nothing wherewith to pay"; in the other "an hundred pence" and only time required to insure full payment.

Note also the contrast in action. The king, in a truly royal spirit, freely forgave the enormous debt. The servant, with the spirit of a slave, cast his fellow servant into prison for a mere trifle.

The retribution that follows at the hands of the justly indignant king is far more terrible than the fate which originally threatened the debtor servant.

As we read the story we sympathize heartily with the wrath of the king and we feel that the punishment inflicted by him was just. At the same time we are conscious that it embodies a certain harshness of spirit and an arbitrary use of power which we cannot attribute to an infinitely loving God. That the heavenly Father should revoke a pardon once granted, and that he should visit retributive torment upon one of his children, is not to be thought of for a moment. Such an act would place him in the category of a pagan tyrant, capricious, irresponsible, unlovable and unloving.

There is serious danger in that method of dealing with the parables which seeks to establish exact parallels between the lines of the picture and those of the divine life, and to find in each figure of the story the perfect representative of some personality involved in our spiritual relations. By this method the character of God has often been sadly distorted and misrepresented to men. To escape this danger we must adopt a much more elastic and general method of interpretation. Clearly we cannot make the king in the story before us a true representative of God in spirit and action. We must rather see in his conduct and spirit the embodiment of certain facts and

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laws that work not capriciously but surely and invariably in carrying out God's great plan for the redemption of man. What are these facts and laws?

The chief difficulty with this parable and others like it is that they sometimes lead us to externalize God in our thought and to picture the kingdom of heaven as an organization or institution outside ourselves. We see in the picture a God who sits enthroned afar off in the heavens, ruling man as an earthly sovereign rules his subjects; yes, even as an absentee landlord deals with his tenants. And too often we see also a Church of God with its fellowship of disciples constituting the kingdom of heaven.

Now let us put away these false notions. Let us think of God as a divine life within our own hearts, and let us remember that the kingdom of heaven is the Christly character within us. Studying our parable in this light we shall see that it portrays certain conditions that threaten the self-destruction of character, and supplies the strongest possible defense against such spiritual disaster. Let us review the details of the story and see how they combine to produce the desired result.

In the first place we are told that when the king had begun to reckon with his servants, "one was brought unto him, that owed him ten thousand talents (perhaps ten million dollars). But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made."

What is this? A picture of conditions under the Jewish dispensation, before the gospel came? No. Is it a picture of God's attitude towards sinful men? Not at all. Rather is it a picture of the first effect of sin upon the sinner under any dispensation, and also of the relation of sin to redemption. What is the first obstacle in any soul to the attainment of holiness? Is it not the consciousness of past sin, of a debt which can never be paid?

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Jesus expresses the universal feeling when he says, "Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin." And St. Paul puts the same idea in a different form in the words, "I am carnal, sold under sin." The soul that aims at high attainment is met at the very outset of its flight by a sense of hopelessness in view of present conditions. There is a heavy debt of sin which "he hath not wherewith to pay," and the sense of hopelessness paralyzes effort.

Turn now to the second scene. "The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt."

In this scene we have a truthful representation of the spirit of God and his relation to men. He always forgives men their sins in the moment of asking, yes, before they ask for forgiveness. The instant a child of God, desiring to attain to the Christlike character, becomes conscious of a great debt of sin hampering him and longs to be rid of the debt, the voice of divine grace speaks the word of pardon. Why does the Bible abound in assurances of God's readiness to forgive sin? Is it not that the greatest obstacle to human redemption may be removed? Men talk a great deal about the difficulty of escaping from the penalty and guilt of sin. The theologians of the ages have woven a marvelous fabric known as the doctrine of the atonement, which is simply a monumental witness to the universal consciousness of sin and of inability to pay the debt. But God repeatedly declares that all past sin is forgiven even before we ask forgiveness. The greatest of the Hebrew preachers proclaims forgiveness, not on the ground of repentance, but as a motive to repentance. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." The

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sense of divine forgiveness is the source of hope, and hope is the necessary inspiration to effort.

The first two scenes in our parable, therefore, set forth the supreme obstacle to the building of the Christly character, in the sense of past sin, and the divine method of removing that obstacle by the revelation of God's forgiving love. (The sense of forgiveness is the open door to the heavenly life and character.)

In the third scene we are confronted with a widely different picture. "The same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but **went and cast him into prison,** till he should pay the debt."

Think of it! The man who had just been forgiven a debt of ten millions imprisons his fellow for a debt of fifteen dollars. He is not moved to pity even when his fellow servant pleads with him in precisely the words he himself had used to his lord. And in the case of this second the words were more significant than in his own; for despite his promise he could not have paid his own debt. But the fellow servant might easily have paid the smaller debt in a short time.

Still, that is merely incidental. The abiding impression made upon us by this scene grows out of the contrasted debts. Ten thousand talents—an hundred pence. The ratio is more than six hundred thousand to one. What is the thought? That our offenses against God are literally so much greater or more manifold than the offenses of others against us? Perhaps not. That matters little. The fact of vital significance is that in their effect upon the development of character, in their relation to our personal redemption, our offendings against others—i. e., God and our fellow men—whether few or

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many, exert a vastly more potent influence for evil than do the offendings of others against us.

"Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" says our Lord in another place. What? My sins a beam, and my brother's only a mote? Not in an absolute sense, but when viewed in their relation to my own life and spiritual growth. My smallest sin will hinder my sanctification far more than the greatest sin of my neighbor. A mere breath of impurity in my own soul will drive me farther from the kingdom of heaven than a tempest of vileness from my brother can do.

We reverse the glass and see things with a false perspective. To us the offenses of others against us seem immeasurably greater than our offenses against them or against God. We magnify wrongs and slights and injuries received till they seem unpardonable. But our own failings and shortcomings and transgressions we view with a lenient eye. We would be better for a few lessons in divine bookkeeping. We need to study the contrasts as drawn by our Lord—ten thousand talents over against an hundred pence, a beam in contrast with a mote. These are not exaggerations. They represent literal truth.

Let us give full weight to this element of the parable. Let its light shine out clear and bright, for only so shall we appreciate the infinite marvel of divine forgiveness as it stands out in contrast against our grudging and unforgiveness. Only so shall we be able to understand the immeasurably greater influence of our own sins upon our character than that of the sins of others. Seen through the gospel object-glass our sins loom up like mountains, while the wrongs done us by others dwindle slowly away to nothingness.

Now take the last scene in the parable. His fellow servants, indignant at the conduct of this man, report it in detail to their lord; and he, after sternly denouncing

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the ungenerous conduct of him whom he had so freely forgiven, "delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due." And Jesus appends the words of our text to the effect that this represents God's method of dealing with men. How does it represent God? Certainly not in a direct and immediate sense. We cannot think of God as revoking a pardon once granted. That were capricious and tyrannical, however great the provocation. We instinctively recoil from such an interpretation. What, then, is the meaning?

We may seek it along the line already suggested. As a sense of forgiveness is necessary to inspire hope and courage in the struggle for character, so the spirit of forgiveness is necessary to the attainment and continued possession of character. The burden of unforgiven sin may hold a soul in hopeless bondage and so paralyze all endeavor towards noble effort; but an unforgiving spirit will drag the soul from the loftiest height and keep it in perpetual torment which is a foretaste of hell. Conceive, if you can, any more terrible punishment to be inflicted upon a human soul either here or hereafter than the continual cherishing of grudges against those who have done it wrong. Such a spirit not only blights all hope of moral and spiritual progress, but it gnaws at the soul as a canker or burns as a flame. That the heart should be perpetually lacerated with its own petty grudges or stung with the venom of its own enmities, that is the supreme penalty of wrong-doing.

And this is, if I mistake not, the precise meaning of our Lord's application of his parable. Who would attain to the Christly character must be forgiving as well as forgiven. He must be forgiving if he would not frustrate all the purpose of being forgiven, yes, if he would not utterly efface from his own heart the very sense of divine forgiveness. Do not externalize God. Do not think of him as a being remote from self, who forgives or withholds forgiveness "according to his

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good pleasure." (The kingdom of heaven is not a city with walls and gates to be opened or closed by the fiat of One who is wholly apart from yourself. No, heaven is within and God is within.) As Milton has it,

"The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."


Imagine yourself in the redeemed city of the Apocalypse, with all its glory of pearly gates and golden streets. As you walk amid its glories, you suddenly meet some one who had offended you and whom you had not forgiven. What would happen? Why, the rising of that old grudge would destroy all your bliss in a moment. It would work a transformation more complete and startling than the fabled destruction of Kling-sor's palace when Parsifal makes the sign of the cross with the sacred spear.

The lesson of the parable, then, is a simple one, and vital to our spiritual growth. Salvation is the rescue of character. It is not a scheme for getting into heaven. It is rather the process of getting heaven into the soul through the conquest of self and sin. The first condition of such conquest is the realization of forgiveness. But there can be no abiding sense of forgiveness in a soul that is itself unforgiving. We can only know such attributes and qualities of God as find a response in our own hearts, and we come to know him more perfectly as we ourselves grow into his likeness. The cherishing of a grudge, the harboring of a vindictive spirit, will utterly obscure all sense of divine forgiveness and hold the soul in perpetual torment.

"How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" Ah, Peter, do not be so anxious to discover the limitation of forgiveness and duty! What were your hope if God set a limit to his forgiveness? "Till seven times?" Ah, grudging soul, cease your careful

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counting! Do not hasten to be done with forgiving. Welcome each new opportunity to forgive your brother, and cry, "Thus, and thus, and thus, do I hope that God may forgive me!" And with its continual exercise the practise of forgiveness shall grow easier, the spirit of forgiveness more natural and strong; and in the ever clearer shining of God's love the kingdom of heaven shall be built up in your soul till all the life is filled with its beauty, its glory and its joy.



Character and Salvation
Inseparable

CHAPTER XII

Character and Salvation Inseparable

THE MARRIAGE FEAST

Matt. 22:2-14

Text.—"*He was speechless.*"—Matt. 22:12

A FEAST, *a marriage feast*, A ROYAL MARRIAGE FEAST. To the Oriental mind this represents the acme of physical pleasure. It is the crowning symbol of earthly joy. Hence Jesus selects this as the most attractive and at the same time the most fitting type of the heavenly life. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son."

A brief glance at the connection helps us to interpret the parable intelligently. This is the concluding picture of a series, the final home thrust of a threefold lesson. Let us review afresh the steps which lead to it.

Self-appointed censors in the persons of certain chief priests and elders have challenged our Lord's authority. A straightforward counter-challenge they have refused to answer. The simplest test of their claims to religious leadership has put them to silence. Before a natural and honest question they are speechless.

Then follows a parable—the parable of The Two Sons—which betrays them into self-conviction. A second—the parable of The Husbandmen and the Vineyard—drives them to self-sentence. And now, when they clearly understand the drift of his words, Jesus pro-

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ceeds to sketch a picture of his opponents in speechless confusion and to expose to their quickened sensibilities their true relation to the kingdom of heaven.

Note the train of thought in our parable. In its first stage it is simply a repetition of the corresponding part of the preceding parable under a changed figure. It portrays the treatment which God's messengers received at the hands of men in former ages. But, interpolating a few words as to their punishment, the emphasis is thrown upon the result of their conduct rather than upon the conduct itself. Advancing from this point, the thought takes a wholly new turn. Up to this time Jesus has identified his hearers with the fathers along the line of open rebellion. Now, allowing a possible difference in the outward manifestation of their spirit, he shows that the same fate threatens as a result of self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

After declaring the punishment of those who had rejected the original invitation, a second invitation is issued as free and as urgent as the first; and it is far broader in its scope. Still, that invitation implies a decent politeness in donning the provided garments upon entering the banquet-hall, just as truly as a readiness to partake of the feast. One, however, appears without a wedding garment. True, we are not told that garments were furnished to all who came; but the utter speechlessness of the man when challenged is in itself a confession that his condition was not the result of any failure in the provision of the host, but of culpable neglect or perhaps of designed insult on his own part.

Twice Jesus has made the personal application for his hearers. No need to make it in this case. The original of the portrait is clearly before him. By this time the chief priests and elders know that he is speaking of them, and they have only to fill out the sketch line by line to see in it their own portrait. Their fathers had rejected the divine invitation; but they flatter themselves

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that they have accepted it. Yes, they fancy that even now they are in the kingdom, that they have already entered the royal banquet-hall and are sitting at the festal-table.

But a question has been put to them. It is the question of a few moments ago. And what was that? A question about John? No. It was really a question about themselves, a challenge of their pretensions. The question about John they could have answered if they would. It was simple and direct. The real question, and the one that gave them difficulty, was this: "How do you venture to defy my authority, when you dare not honestly assert your own? How do you claim a place in my Father's kingdom, when you do not manifest the spirit and character which alone befit the kingdom? How came you at the heavenly feast not having on the wedding garment of a sincere and heavenly character?" And the self-evident inexcusableness of their position made them speechless.

The conclusion is only too plain and unavoidable. By open rebellion and disobedience your fathers refused to enter into the blessings of God's kingdom. And you, although you have not joined in their overt rejection of the joys of that kingdom, are yet in a like position with them; for you have neglected the conditions by which those joys are obtained, viz., holiness of life and sincerity of heart; hence that which they scornfully rejected you will lose through neglect and hypocrisy. It is not enough formally to assent to the divine call. It is not enough to be found among those who render a conventional obedience to God's commands and call themselves his children. There must be personal righteousness, personal sincerity, personal preparation of character and life. Wanting this, you will be self-banished into outer darkness, where there is neither joy nor blessing, but where all is misery and sorrow.

Now, putting ourselves in the place of the chief

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priests and elders, let us listen to this story once more and ask what it means for us.

The finger-point is on the man without a wedding garment. He stands out most clearly as the central figure of this story. Other details link the present parable more or less closely with its fellows, but the closing incident is unique and impressive. In it we shall find the essence of its truth, the focus of its light. And this is the truth which it illustrates: *Christly character is essential to heavenly joy.*

In other words, salvation and character are inseparable. In certain quarters we often hear the phrase, "Salvation by character." It is a suggestive phrase, but inadequate. We should rather talk of "salvation to character"; for character itself *is* salvation. It is not the means or power by which salvation is secured; it is, rather, the end of salvation, or at least a part of that end. To enter heaven, to mingle with the society of the redeemed, to view the joys prepared for those who love God, all this affords no real satisfaction to the soul that is itself unholy, but only plunges it into deeper misery and darkness. If heaven be a place, then it is such a place as only the heavenly-minded can enjoy. All others are repelled by the inherent antagonism of their unheavenly natures. It is certainly true, at least in part, that—

"The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven,"

although Milton, by putting those words in the mouth of Satan, doubtless intended to brand them as false. Nor less true are those other words attributed to the same speaker, "Myself am hell." They express in concise form the very kernel of our parable. See how all the incidents group themselves about this focal thought.

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This is a parable of the kingdom of heaven, i. e., a parable of the Christly character. The gladness of the scene is the necessary manifestation of such character. It is Christly character that is likened to a royal marriage feast. It is want of the Christly character that deprives every soul of the heavenly joy.

The picture is not in any sense twofold. Throughout it illustrates a single thought. This want of character that shuts the soul out of the heavenly joy may betray itself in different ways. Three forms of its manifestation are depicted—levity, rebellion and neglect.

First we have a picture of levity. Of the guests originally invited it is said that some “made light” of the invitation. The attractions of the heavenly life were treated by them as matters of ridicule. There is no more dangerous attitude of mind than that which makes light of truth and righteousness. The Psalmist classes the “scorner” with the ungodly and sinners. His classification is a wise one. If the scorner be not already wicked, he is in a fair way to become so. Worse than that, he is sure to drag others down with him. The atmosphere of scorn is destructive not alone to the spiritual life, but to the most ordinary moral life as well.

The moral fiber of every age has been built up by men and nations that have taken life seriously. Sometimes they have gone to the extreme of solemnity, as in the case of the Puritans and early Quakers; but everybody knows that the gloomy Roundhead left a better legacy to Great Britain than did the flippant Cavalier. America owes a debt that can never be estimated to the stern and uncompromising but never irreverent settlers of New England.

On the other hand, many a community has been laughed into confusion and many a nation sneered into anarchy by the mockery of a Voltaire. Every thought-

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ful observer may see this process going on daily in the world—the spirit of levity or ridicule undermining character, and character thus debased becoming incapable of heavenly fellowship or heavenly joy. Every earnest soul must learn this lesson, viz., that there are but two steps from levity to perdition.

Rebellion is the second form in which fatal want of character reveals itself. “The rest took his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them,” says the parable. It requires no argument or even illustration to convince our minds that open and aggressive wickedness is a sufficient ground for exclusion from the heavenly kingdom and its blessings. But we do not always realize as fully as we ought the fact that sin is not only the reason of exclusion, but the very force which excludes the soul from heavenly joy. We are wont to think of the power that excludes as external to ourselves. In a word, we imagine that it is God who excludes, and that he may if he choose graciously admit even sinful souls to heaven at the last.

Do not overlook the fact that the rebellious ones were not thrust out from the feast by the king, but themselves refused to come to the feast. As holiness is an attractive force, so sin is a repulsive force that of itself excludes the sinner from the heavenly kingdom. I say it reverently but earnestly, not even God himself can save a soul *in* sin. Only as a soul is saved *from* sin can that soul be brought into a participation in the bliss of the redeemed. Rebellion against God is perdition. Sin is hell. So long as we retain unholiness of character, we are rejecting the divine invitation and making it impossible for God to save us.

A third form in which want of the Christly character may betray itself is *neglect*. Among those who responded to the second urgent invitation, the king found one “who had not on a wedding-garment.” The others have held themselves wholly aloof. They have

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spurned the invitation and avoided the assembled company, betaking themselves to places and occupations far removed from the scene of pleasure. But this man has come in with the crowd. He mingles freely with them. He seats himself at the banqueting-table. But further than this he cannot go. His want of character discovers itself and he is cast out. What though he has entered the hall? What though he has accounted himself one of the company? He is out of place. His nature is not in harmony with the occasion. Hence he cannot become in any real sense a sharer in the gladness of the hour.

At no point does the parable touch more closely upon present life and present danger than at this. On the one hand Christian ideals and customs or methods of life have become so generally prevalent in a land like ours that they are adopted by all with little thought. We go *with the multitude* to the house of God. We join with the saints in all the outward forms of worship. We follow their lead in a good many things, mingling in their organizations, patronizing their reforms and improvements, taking part in their charities and benevolences, falling in with the conventional manners and customs of their daily life; and we easily persuade ourselves that we are as veritable saints as any of them. Do we not enter into the banquet-hall in their company? Are we not seated in their midst at the festal board? Are we not to all intents and purposes of their company? Does not the popular judgment reckon us among them?

Furthermore, we are wont to talk of salvation as though it consisted simply in gaining admittance to a place with pearly gates and shining streets called "Heaven"; or as though it were a mere matter of securing a favorable judgment from God. In short, we look upon it as wholly a question of fate and external circumstance.

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Jesus reiterates the thought that salvation is inseparably linked with character; more—that salvation is primarily the rescue of character. Until this rescue is accomplished, salvation can have no real meaning. The sinner may enter the company of the saints, but he cannot know the joy of the saints. His sinful nature makes that impossible. What advantage, then, to enter the city of gold, if we are out of harmony with its life? He who does not enjoy the society of the saints and their life here on earth, how can he be otherwise than supremely miserable in the perfect righteousness of that heavenly abode and in the immediate presence of God?

In the story, the king is represented as commanding the expulsion of the impudent guest. The parallelism is not complete at this point; for the nature of the case does not admit of it. The result, however, is set forth with absolute exactness. The destiny of man is not determined by divine Omnipotence exerted in complete independence of his own will and action. The power of God is always and invariably manifested in working out the results of sin according to fixed and clearly revealed laws. The force that drives the soul from the joys of heaven is *the expulsive force of sin*. The outer darkness is sin-created. The weeping and the gnashing of teeth are the necessary accompaniments of a sinful life.

All these facts may be observed daily in our common life. The self-banishment of men from the joy and blessing of the heavenly life is an every-day occurrence. In our own personal experience we have known it. We have sought the company of the good and the true in the vain hope that the gladness of their goodness might be ours. But, neglecting to array ourselves in their purity and holiness of character, we have found ourselves unable to share in their real joy, or even to comprehend it; and soon the repellent force of our unsanctified life has hurled us forth into our native darkness

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and misery. He who would know the bliss of the saints must himself be a saint.

Equally common and easy to be observed is the fact that those who really enter into the true life are few by comparison with those to whom the opportunity is presented. "Many are called, but few are chosen," says the voice of continuous experience. The invitations of grace are from God, and are as boundless as his everlasting love. The election to joy or woe is of man, and it is limited by the narrow horizon of human desire. To put it in a sentence, the inclusive invitation is God's; the exclusive election is man's.

What provision had been made for the man of the parable we do not certainly know. We can easily infer that a wedding-garment was to be had for the taking. But this we do know: ample provision is made for every one who desires to attain to holiness of life. The heavenly king not only invites us to the marriage-feast of joy, but he offers us all that is necessary to enable us to enter into its perfect enjoyment; he offers us the power to overcome sin and to develop such a character as shall fit us for the unhindered participation in the bliss of heaven. Not for a few, but for all, is the Christly character and the heavenly joy possible. That is the very essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God." The robe awaits every one of us—not the robe of a fictitious and imputed righteousness, but the robe of a true and recognized righteousness. The invitation is first an invitation to don the robe and then to partake of the feast. Jesus Christ was a "holiness man" in the true sense of that term. Through him the power of holiness is offered, and with holiness salvation. Not salvation without holiness, for holiness is salvation, while unholiness is perdition.

The picture fades from the screen. The story dies

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away into silence. But the words linger in the mind—*"He was speechless!"*

Ah, we may be bold enough in challenging some arbitrary notion of divine authority. With ready impudence we may question the methods of the divine government in relation to many things. We may dispute the teachings of Jesus and cast doubt upon his work, his nature, his life; but when the clear light of divinest truth is turned upon our own hearts and all other questions are put out of sight and out of mind, we shall be speechless. Hypocrisy has no voice with which to answer truth. Sin, when brought face to face with holiness, is dumb.

The sharpest pang in the sorrow of the lost is the consciousness that his misery is self-inflicted. The saved have not withheld from him a share of their bliss. God has not debarred him from its enjoyment. From saved and Saviour together have gone forth numberless and urgent invitations. But his own levity, rebellion, or neglect has shut him from the heavenly feast. "The Lord's hand is not shortened . . . neither his ear heavy . . . but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you," is the word of the old prophet; and in the light of the Judgment Day the speechless tongues of the lost will bear tacit witness to the truth of his words.

To-day the kingdom of heaven is open to all. To-day the invitation comes to you and to me from the King of kings. It calls to a glad festival. It offers the wedding-garment. Not an imputed but an imparted righteousness is the message of the gospel. It is your privilege to be made free from sin and to enter upon a life of Christlike holiness. Accepting the invitation, putting on the spotless robe, no power in the universe will or can hinder you from sharing the heavenly feast.

The Test of Character

CHAPTER XIII

The Test of Character

THE TEN VIRGINS

Matt. 25:1-13

Text.—“*The wise took oil.*”—Matt. 25:4

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”

THUS speaks Brutus in Shakespeare’s “Julius Cæsar”; and the words, confirmed by universal experience, have been graven on the page of eternal truth. Of similar import are the words of Voltaire, “I have noticed that destiny in every case depends upon the act of a moment.”

In every life there are certain crises. The most commonplace and uneventful career is not without its emergencies. To the most far-sighted some events will come unexpectedly. And it is the unforeseen, the critical, that tests the life.

The most ordinary sailor can manage a vessel well enough when the sea is smooth and the wind favorable. It is the storm with its contrary winds and boisterous waves that proves the really skilful mariner or fills the unskilled with despair. So the quiet of our human life shows little difference between the weak and the strong,

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the real and the unreal; but crises are the great revealers. The unexpected event, the emergency, is the betrayer of sham or the witness of true strength.

Jesus has been speaking of the "Second Advent." Of all that is involved in that doctrine the world is still ignorant for the most part. I am not sure that our Lord ever intended it should have the prominence that it has gained in certain quarters in the present age. Certainly I shall not attempt to explain either the mode or the consequences of that event or its relation to other great events, such as the dawn of the millennium. But one thing seems perfectly clear. The time of his return was unknown even to Jesus himself, and whenever it occurs, it will be wholly unexpected. In fact, this is the use that our Lord makes of the doctrine. His "Second Advent," as we call it, is represented by him as *the typical crisis or emergency in human life*.

They are not wholly wrong who speak of death and the coming of Christ as synonymous. As events they are wholly distinct and almost antipodal in character. But as crises they are closely related. If the advent of the Christ be the supreme crisis for all, yet, for those who pass away before that event takes place, death is the greatest earthly emergency. Hence the two ideas are in this sense interchangeable.

In the preceding chapter Jesus has expressed very clearly and at considerable length this thought of the Second Advent as the supreme emergency; and in the light of that chapter we must interpret the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

The story analyzed resolves itself into three distinct scenes. First, we see ten young and beautiful maidens clad in festal attire and with blazing torch-lamps going forth to a place of rendezvous to await the coming of a bridal party, that they may escort the happy pair to the wedding-feast. There they dispose themselves to rest till the bridegroom shall appear.

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The second scene opens with the announcement of the bridegroom's approach. Quickly the maidens awake and prepare their torches for the march. Five pour fresh oil into their lamps and are instantly ready to go forth. The other five try in vain to relight their dry and charred wicks, and then appeal to their friends for more oil, but are refused and rush out into the darkness in quest of a fresh supply, while the procession moves on to the banquet-hall.

Finally, we behold the foolish five in the dim shadows outside the door of the bridal mansion, knocking and piteously pleading for admittance, which is denied them.

The connection would indicate a parable of the Second Advent. In other words, it is a picture of life's crisis or emergency. What is the figure employed? Some dire calamity? Some dreaded evil? No. It is a marriage-feast, an event of the most joyful character.

The great emergencies or testing times of life are not necessarily events to be dreaded. They are not in themselves misfortunes. That depends altogether upon ourselves. Like all of God's providences, they are sent as ministers of good, if we treat them aright. They are to be dreaded only by the unready or consciously and wilfully neglectful. The sudden coming of his master is not dreaded by the faithful servant; for it means the recognition and probable reward of his faithfulness. Only he who is consciously unfaithful trembles when he hears his master's footfall. Even so the coming of the Christ is to the diligent and worthy disciple the gladdest of all events even though it occur at the most unlikely moment.

The story, I repeat, is a parable of supreme emergency; but it is also a parable of character. The opening words declare it to be a picture of "the kingdom of heaven," i. e., of Christly character. Jesus says, "The Christly character shall be likened unto ten virgins," etc.

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We have, therefore, the two thoughts of character and crisis linked together, but how?

Light clearly represents conduct or outward appearance. That is the natural interpretation of the figure, and it is borne out by our Lord's common usage. The oil supply upon which the quality and permanence of the light depends typifies the character which determines conduct. In the movement of the story the climax is reached with the coming of the bridegroom and the consequent discovery of unreadiness on the one hand and readiness on the other. Is not the meaning plain?

The Crisis is the Test of Character

Until the emergency arrives there is no distinction apparent between the different members of this gay company. As the maidens set out for the place of meeting you see no reason to call some wise and others foolish. They are equally beautiful and attractive. All the lamps burn with equal brightness. While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. Still no difference. At the announcement of the bridegroom's approach all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. They are equally prompt, equally eager. But now a difference appears. Five of the lamps are quickly lighted. The other five smoke and go out. Then comes the sad exposure and confession of unreadiness.

Is not the picture true to life? Is it not all too common? We may see the ten wherever we look. They sit side by side in every church. They work at the same tasks in shop or factory or market or household. They mingle in the same circles in society, they engage in the same pleasures, they participate in the same popular works of benevolence, the same externals of religious worship. The outward behavior of all conforms to the same conventional standards of Christian conduct. In the quiet flow of ordinary life we cannot distinguish between them in the matter of character. They exhibit

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the common virtues and the pleasing qualities that make them agreeable members of society. They take their place unquestioned among the saints. We cannot say that this one is wise and that one foolish, this one possessed of the true spiritual life, that one merely following the outward fashion of that life. In fact, we are not called upon to pass judgments thus upon our fellows.

Suddenly, however, there comes an emergency. Some great wave of disappointment or adversity or sorrow sweeps over the life; or perhaps some unexpected wind of prosperity strikes upon it; and how different the effect upon different individuals! In one case the sorrow or the failure or the trial only serves to bring to view strength and grace hitherto concealed beneath a quiet exterior. There is grief and disappointment, very deep, perhaps, but beneath it there runs the smooth current of peace and trust that holds the soul in quietness. From the trial it comes forth with new radiance and power, made more than ever like the Master by the discipline of an adverse providence. Or, being lifted on a wave of unforeseen prosperity, it suffers no loss of sweetness and beauty, but makes the new-found joy a means of larger kindness and help to others. In another case, the soul is quite overwhelmed by trial or swept wholly away by temptation. Instead of being tutored to a larger sympathy by the experience of sorrow, there is a narrowing and infolding of the soul upon itself that finds expression in peevish repining that adds to the already sufficient misery of mankind. No less surely does the exaltation of some sudden success in such a one turn the seeming goodness into vanity and pride, and accumulated blessing only accentuates personal selfishness. Before the unexpected test the thin gilding of outward religion and faith disappears, exposing the weakness and the sham beneath.

So, always, the emergency is the revealer of true character; it is the test of moral strength and genuineness.

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As some one has wisely said, "No man has any more religion than he can command in an emergency." Happy is he who can meet life's crises as calmly and as gladly as he meets the common round of daily duty. He alone is possessed of true spiritual strength, of genuine manly and godly character.

Do not turn with critical questioning to the conduct of the wise virgins in refusing to share their oil with their sisters in the moment of their dismay. What though it seem unkind? We need not stumble at that point. Whether kind or unkind, it is the only possible way to represent in the action of the story the great spiritual fact for which it stands. They might have shared their oil; but we cannot share our character. Character is not transferable. No man can divide his character with his brother. The father cannot share with the son nor the mother with her daughter. Each one of us must possess character for himself or be without it.

Even the old-time notion of sharing the character of Christ is obsolete to-day. Some have so interpreted the gospel plan of salvation as to make it a scheme whereby the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to the believer becomes the ground of his acceptance with God and admittance to heavenly joy. Now imputed righteousness is imputed nonsense, i. e., it is unrighteousness. Worse than that, it is infinite fraud. To say that God will account you or me as righteous when we are not because he imputes to us the righteousness of Jesus, is to dishonor God by making him the author and approver of the most stupendous lie ever perpetrated. "But what," you say, "shall we do with St. Paul and his doctrine of imputed righteousness?" Why, interpret him differently! If you cannot do so, then follow the apostle's own advice and "Let God be true, but every man (even St. Paul if need be) a liar."

Turn now to the closing scene of the parable. Here we

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see the return of the maidens from their fruitless quest and their vain plea for admittance to the feast. How shall we interpret that? Shall we say that at some time even character will not avail with men or be accepted of God? I think not.

Doubtless you have often pictured this scene before your mind, and this is what has appeared, is it not? The five foolish virgins with their lamps freshly filled and an abundant supply of oil standing outside the closed door in a brilliant glare of their own light, asking admission. But is that a truthful picture? Think a moment. At what hour were they awakened? Midnight. What shops would be open at that hour? Where could they hope to find a fresh supply of oil then? True, they were bidden to go to them that sell and buy; but that was only another way of refusing their request, or an indication of the confusion of the moment. True, also, they rush forth; but that only shows their utter distraction and helplessness. After running hither and thither for a time on their bootless errand, they gradually come to their senses and realize the cumulative foolishness of their conduct. Then they all come back again in the darkness with unlighted lamps and pray for admittance; and it is because they are still unfurnished with light that they are refused. The lamp was the real passport to the feast. It was in the capacity of light bearers that they had come, and while they are unable to fulfil the purpose for which they are commissioned they have no place in the festal gathering.

Is the interpretation difficult? Assuredly not. Worthy character will always be recognized, approved, welcomed, whenever and wherever it presents itself. But there may come a time when character can no longer be developed. There may be a midnight for the human soul, a time when the desire for holiness shall cease or when the capacity for moral attainment shall be lost. Regarding the conditions of the future life we can only speculate;

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but the laws which all may observe in continuous operation in the present life tend rapidly to fix character either for good or ill, for weakness or strength. Every day that we neglect to cultivate the true life in our souls that life becomes the more difficult to attain. Character tends to crystallize.

Or, taking the truth in its more general application, character is never developed in an emergency. The great trial does not develop moral strength where before was weakness or indifference. It only brings out the strength that was latent and increases it by exercise. The exigency of an exodus will not make a Moses, but it will take a Moses already made from the obscurity of an Arabian desert and reveal him to a waiting world. The conflict with slavery did not make a Lincoln, but when a Lincoln had been made in the quiet of humble training it brought him out into the larger service and by searching tests proved him to be the man of the hour.

The hour of death is no time in which to prepare for death, nor can any soul be made ready for the coming of the Christ after the tokens of that coming have appeared. A death-bed repentance cannot change in a moment the character which has been forming through long years of sinful life; it cannot supply for the emergency the spiritual attainment that has been neglected through months of idleness and indifference. At best it can but mark the beginning of a work that must be accomplished in another sphere—if in that other sphere there be opportunity for such accomplishment. The majority of such repentances are but the cry of the foolish maidens, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out!" Who would die the death of the righteous must live the life of the righteous. There is no other way.

The crisis, whatever it may be, proves or reveals character. It never develops or creates character. That is always accomplished in the quiet and ordinary flow of life. The heroism displayed on the battle-field is often

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acquired in the harvest-field. The strength that manifests itself in the storm is built up in the sunshine. The peace that smiles in affliction grows in the quiet of affection. You cannot prepare for temptation or trial, for adversity or prosperity, when you stand face to face with the emergency. Then it is too late. That is the time for action, not for preparation. Now, in the time of quiet, is the time to grow strong. In time of peace prepare for war. In the calm trim your vessel for the storm. In life make ready for death. Open your heart to the Christ now. Receive his Spirit now. Enter his service now. Let your daily life be the discipline which shall make you strong and brave and true. Let your common toil be the loom upon which you weave a noble character, the mine from which you dig rich stores of spiritual experience. Then, when some great trial or opportunity comes, when you are suddenly called upon to face some great crisis of life, you can fall back upon the accumulated strength of years and it will not fail.

No sadder word is found in all the teachings of Jesus than that spoken to the foolish virgins, "The door was shut." Opportunity passed; admittance denied; "I know you not."

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"

Remember, this is not the harsh sentence of an offended God who might, if he chose, act differently. Rather is it a simple picture of necessary truth. The outcome could not be otherwise without doing violence to our common intelligence. The crisis shows what you are. If a man is what he ought to be and may be, nothing can be more joyful than this—to be shown as he is. But if he be weak and false, this same is to him the most dreadful—to be shown as he is.

Who can measure the importance of the uneventful,

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the significance of the commonplace in life? This quiet flow of daily toil and service which we so often think of with contempt, this even motion of ordinary drudgery which we would so gladly escape, is the growing time of character, the precious opportunity for gaining strength, the exercise by which our spiritual muscles are hardened for conflict and victory.

Your life moves on quietly and inconspicuously, and you think that you have no call to be careful or to strive for power. All your experience is attuned to the humdrum. What call for great moral development? What reward for effort? Wait. The emergency will come, and when you least expect it; not the emergency you look for, but one altogether unexpected. You will be ready? Suppose it is the failure of your most cherished plans; suppose it is the loss of the one you love best; suppose it is some insidious temptation; will you be prepared to meet the test and to come off victorious? Take the one great, all-embracing emergency—if the Christ should come, are you ready to meet him? If you knew that he would come with to-morrow's dawning, would you wish to make any change in your life by way of preparation? Beware! Midnight is no time to be searching the markets for oil. Fill your lamps now while the day lasts and the markets are open. Happy is he who so lives every day that no emergency can distract him, nor any crisis betray him. Happy is he who is ever ready for the coming of the Christ.

Life is opportunity; death is emergency; judgment is revelation; destiny is fruition. Wisely use life's opportunity, and thou shalt neither dread death's emergency nor fear the judgment's revelation. The rather shalt thou gladly welcome both as necessary forerunners of a joyous and eternal fruition.

The Law of Character

CHAPTER XIV

The Law of Character

THE TALENTS

Matt. 25:14-30

Text.—“Unto every one that hath shall be given.”—Matt. 25:29

AMONG the New Testament stories few are more familiar than the parable of The Talents, and few are more frequently read by the disciple or expounded by the preacher. Perhaps, however, its last message has not yet been spoken. Perhaps it will yield fresh thought to us even at the present moment if we study it once more in the light of the Holy Spirit.

I venture the assertion that most of us have been wont to interpret this as a parable of two worlds. The first scene, we say, is laid in this world. It represents the life that now is in its relation to human destiny, and we have called it “Probation.” Scene second we have relegated to the world to come, and we have summed it up in the one word “Judgment.” This mode of interpretation makes the parable of The Talents a representation of that somewhat remote and often perverted ideal of the divine government.

Without calling in question the correctness of this interpretation, I ask you to look at the picture just now from another standpoint, not that we may discover a different truth, but that we may study the same truth on a different scale. You look directly at the earth and

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you see but a small portion of its surface. From the loftiest mountain peak and aided by the most powerful telescope the area seen is still inconsiderable. The geographical knowledge to be acquired by such a method would be, for the average man, exceedingly limited and incomplete. But using a globe or a map which brings the entire surface of the earth before us in a picture and on a reduced scale, the study of that surface is made easy and the pupils in our common schools can tell us much about the lands on all parts of the globe, even though they have never traveled beyond the boundaries of their native village. So the process of the divine government as it extends from time to eternity, from this world to the next, is beyond our ken; but it has its miniature, like the pupil's map, which we see every day, and we may both understand this smaller representation and from it learn much regarding the infinitely larger truth.

Noting the connection of the parable with what goes before, we see that it is a parable of the "kingdom of heaven," even though the words have been omitted in the Revised Version. In other words, it is a panorama of the development and destruction of character; and that is not something remote or mysterious or difficult to understand. On the contrary, it is a process that we see daily working itself out in our midst; yes, a process that is going on continually towards one goal or the other in every human life. We may observe it, if we will, at every stage of either the development or the destruction—the beginnings, the progress, and the completed result. It is not at all a question of what may happen in another world and under other conditions, but of what is happening in this world and under our very eyes. The conditions and influences of eternity are but the conditions and influences of this present time projected upon an infinitely larger scale. The eternal is the real world, God's world; and this temporal

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is only our little map upon which we trace out the grand divisions and outlines of the kingdom of God.

The Law of Character, i. e., of its development or destruction, is the topic of our parable. Analyzing the story, we discover the successive steps which result on the one hand in ennobled manhood and on the other in spiritual degeneracy. First in order comes the picture of development or growth.

A wealthy proprietor, going on a long journey, distributes his property among his servants, giving to one five talents, to another two, and to another one, and departs. Of the first and second servants it is said that they immediately began to trade with the money entrusted to them and doubled it. In other words, they did just as they would have done had their lord been present to watch and direct them, and their *faithfulness* is the first step towards success.

Character is independent of gifts. The distribution of the talents is not equal. One receives five, another two and another one, and so on; each receiving "according to his several ability." But when the reckoning comes, the reward and commendation bestowed upon the man who had received but two talents and had gained but two are precisely the same as to him who had received and gained five talents. The basis of both reward and commendation is faithfulness.

The analogy is perfect. With all due apologies to John Hancock and the other framers of the Declaration of Independence, I venture to assert that all men are *not* created equal, even though they are created free. On the contrary, the most superficial observer cannot fail to discern great differences in men as they are born into the world. Some men are born with weak minds, others with strong intellectual powers. One man is born a genius, another a drudge. One has naturally fine tastes, another is by nature coarse and unappreciative. Heredity is a prominent factor in human life; and heredity

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means inequality at birth. Our parable, therefore, presents an absolutely truthful picture of our common life in this phase of it. The inequalities of gift are brought out in a manner that is unmistakable. We cannot escape or ignore the facts in the case.

While, however, we acknowledge this self-evident inequality of natural gifts in man, we are assured that the Christly character is entirely independent of these gifts. The real worth of any human life is determined not by the materials with which it builds, but by the structure which it rears with those materials. The genius is often a man of unworthy character, while the world has seen many a saint who had few natural gifts and, perhaps, trifling mental power. With God capacity is always the measure of responsibility, and faithfulness alone determines merit. Or better, since we are concerned with attainment rather than with judgment, character grows just in proportion as we use well or ill the opportunities and the gifts that are entrusted to us. I know a man who has built a noble mansion from stones which his neighbors willingly contributed because they thought them worthless. Have you not also seen men building strong characters and hewing out useful lives from gifts which their fellow men have looked upon with contempt? One may construct a miserable hovel out of costliest marble, or he may create a magnificent temple from pudding-stone. Even in material building the skill and purpose of the architect count for more than the stuff which offers itself to his use. Much more true is it that in spiritual building native gifts and inborn talents are wholly subordinate to personal faithfulness and industry.

A second element in the right development of character is *confidence*. Both of the faithful servants bring their money with its gains and render a simple account of service to their lord without comment or explanation. Character makes no apology, it offers no excuse; for these are not needed. The man who brings two talents

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is not called upon to explain that he has not five talents. He makes a brief and businesslike statement: "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents." There is in his report that same ring of manly pride in service well and faithfully performed that characterized the report of the man with five talents. Yet we do not accuse him of conceit or vanity. It is the natural, the proper attitude.

The same quiet confidence growing out of the consciousness of right ought to characterize our religious life. Jesus did not hesitate to declare his own righteousness and to call upon others to follow his example. When St. Paul is leaving Ephesus, as he bids farewell to the brethren, he does not apologize for any imperfections in his life or failure in his service. On the contrary, he calls them to witness how holily and uprightly he has lived among them, and how he has not failed to preach to them the whole gospel of Christ. More than this, he even challenges certain disciples, to whom he writes, with the words, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ."

From such a manly assertion of integrity it is a far cry to the modern "profession of holiness," which finds no warrant in the Scriptures. The one is consistent with the profoundest humility; the other is the sign manual of spiritual pride. The one is the frank challenge of criticism; the other a presumptuous claim that repudiates the right of criticism.

True character stands unabashed and confident before the scrutiny of the world and makes no excuses. It is like Jacob confronting Laban with a challenge to point to any dishonesty in his dealings, or like the Hebrew youths before the king of Babylon, or like Peter and John before the Jewish Sanhedrin, virile not vain, courageous not conceited, strong and impregnable in the consciousness of duty well done, of opportunity used to the full.

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But the climax is yet to come. Character not only inspires courage, it gives power also. To the faithful man comes first confidence, then *sovereignty*. Whether with two talents or with five, he hears the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord." This is what always happens to the faithful in any sphere. Character working through service transforms the servant into a sovereign. In our daily life the growth of character always involves the acquirement of dominion. Man begins life as a servant. As he develops the Christly character he gradually obtains the mastery—the mastery over self, the mastery over sin, the mastery over appetite and passion and indulgence, the mastery over difficulty and trial and pain and sorrow. And we cannot yet say how far this mastery may be carried in its dominion over the forces and phenomena of the universe in which we live.

We share the dominion and the joy of the Christ as we grow in likeness to his perfect character; and this dominating power of character is a principal element in the reward of faithful and holy living. This is the glory of the kingdom of God, that authority and honor come not from great opportunities and exceptional gifts which are the accidents of humanity, but from faithfulness in the use of even the smallest privileges.

Faithfulness, confidence, sovereignty, these three are the invariable tokens of the true development of Christly character. Without the first there can be neither greatness nor goodness. Without it neither genius nor culture can insure a noble life. With it the humblest materials may be transformed into the attributes of perfect sainthood. The faithful man may ever stand "without fear and without reproach" before God and men; and his life will not be without abiding influence in the world. His character will become a dominating force that shall

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govern many and shall bring many into the kingdom of heaven.

If now we have rightly interpreted the message of the faithful servants in the development of character, let us turn to the man with one talent and listen to his message regarding moral and spiritual decay.

The first step towards moral ruin is *neglect*. "I went away and hid thy talent in the earth." Here is no effort at use or gain. It matters not that the neglect or indifference was the result of fear or a misconception of his lord's character. The vital thought is that there was no attempt to prepare for the demand which was sure to be made upon him. True, he had but one talent; but had he been entrusted with ten talents the result would have been proportionately worse, since a greater sum would have been allowed to lie in idleness.

Neglect is the beginning of all worthlessness. Men may complain as they please about the poverty of their gifts, lack of opportunity, the unreasonableness and severity of God's requirements; none of these things can hinder the attainment of noblest character or the achievement of most perfect service if there be an earnest purpose and a spirit of true service on the part of the individual. Unlettered fishermen became the first apostles and preachers of the gospel, while learned Pharisees like Nicodemus and wealthy courtiers like Joseph of Arimathæa must content themselves with the service of undertakers.

Phillips Brooks says, "There are in all our cities a great multitude of useless men, and of men perfectly contented in their uselessness. Many a man looks back upon his life and, save for the kindly offices which he has rendered to his immediate associates, he cannot remember one useful thing he ever did. He never stood up for a good cause. He never remonstrated against an evil. He never helped a bad man to be better. A merely useless man! His life might drop out of the host to-morrow,

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and none would miss a soldier from the ranks. No onset or defense would be the weaker for his going. . . . It is a child of God being slowly made into a man of the world." And the primary force which works out this result is neglect, mere neglect.

What follows neglect? *Apology!* "He also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man—" Stop right there! No need to read any further. I'll warrant his lord knew what was coming when he began in this way. Who begins his account with an apology confesses failure and wrong at the outset. The making of an excuse is an infallible token of lapse of character.

We do well to remember this in our religious life and worship. There is altogether too much of excuse and apology in the religion of the present day. Listen to the preaching from our pulpits. Harken to the testimonies and the prayers in our social meetings. Yes, go into the meetings of our various Young People's Societies and mark all that is said about failure or difficulty in keeping the pledge; for even our young people have caught the disease. We frequently credit this manner of speech to humility. It is not humility; it is either humbug or unfaithfulness. Whichever it is, there is altogether too much of it for our spiritual health and progress. A prominent thinker of our time has described the mood of many modern Christians as being like that of "the man in Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey' whom a mule was about to kick—the attitude of humble apology."

The average confession in public prayer, I say, is either a token of unfaithful living or it is the expression of conscious untruthfulness; and it were difficult to say which is worse. It is high time that men should cease to talk of God as a hard Master, or religious duty and spiritual attainment as impossible, of the burdens and crosses of the Christian life, and should begin to assume a more manly attitude. Blessed is the man who never makes }

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Can excuse! for, although men may call him conceited, verily he is not far from the kingdom of heaven. Adam never apologized for his appearance till he committed his first sin; and from the Creation until now conscious sin and culpable failure have been the fruitful sources of all apology. Excuses have no place in the true life.

The progress of moral decay is swift and sure. First, neglect, then excuse or apology, and then *spiritual loss*. "Take therefore the talent from him," is the sentence pronounced by the angry master upon the unfaithful servant. Who fails to use his gift or his opportunity will lose it. If the worst result of unfaithfulness were the shame of confession, if the progress of evil ended with apology or even with some arbitrary punishment disconnected with the sin, that were bad enough. But when to the shame and confusion of the unfaithful one is added loss of power to develop character, that is unspeakably worse.

And that is the certain result of faithlessness. Look where you will you may see the law at work with terrible regularity. A muscle is unused. What of it? Merely that no valuable work is accomplished? No; far worse than that. The muscle itself perishes. The skilful musician neglects his art. Day after day passes and he leaves his instrument untouched. Friends wait in vain for the sweet tones that have so often delighted their ears. The symphonies are not rendered, the oratorios are silent. The weeks are impoverished; but that is a trifle. The worst is yet to come. At length he seeks the organ once more and runs his fingers over the keys. Alas! where is his old-time skill? The hands have forgotten their cunning. The joints are stiff and awkward. The artist has degenerated into a bungler.

No less sure is the operation of law in the higher realm. Moral power unused decreases. Spiritual gifts held in idleness invariably deteriorate. Character is paralyzed by inactivity. Not only do we wrong our Maker and

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our fellow men when we fail to exert a true and helpful influence in the world, but we ruin ourselves by destroying our moral power. We hear a great deal and we say a great deal about the sin and the danger of wrong-doing; and we often forget that there is another sin equally heinous, another danger equally grave, the sin and the danger of doing nothing at all. And this is its penalty, "He that sinneth . . . wrongeth his own soul!"

If now we have rightly interpreted our parable, it presents to us on the one hand a picture of spiritual development through faithfulness to confidence and sovereignty, and on the other hand the progress of moral degeneration through neglect to apology and utter loss. These two pictures are blended into one and formulated into a general law in the words, "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away." Moral power employed crystallizes into character; neglected, it evaporates.

As we observe the working of this law in the world about us, do we not sometimes feel that it is the embodiment of injustice and wrong? For example, a young man enters professional life. After a long period of study and preparation, in which he has expended all his means and perhaps accumulated a load of debt, he rents an office and puts out a sign. He may be a lawyer or a physician. Day after day he waits eagerly for clients or patients. As he waits, he sees a throng continually passing his door to go to the office of some older and more wealthy attorney who already has more business than he can attend to, or to some physician who is worn out with an overwhelming practise and wishes for nothing more than an opportunity to rest. While these wealthy ones are receiving more and more every day, he thinks of his unpaid board bill and office rent, and wonders if he will ever be able to settle them. Can you

wonder if he mutters under his breath, "Ah, yes, that is always the way. Unto him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath"? Sometimes the young man almost despairs and feels that the affairs of this world are controlled by a very unjust and partial Providence. But is it so? Is not the very difficulty of securing the beginnings of success the strongest possible incentive to high endeavor? Does not the discipline of waiting and discouragement call forth the very best qualities of our manhood and womanhood? To reverse the order were to put a premium on callow and imperfect service; it were to remove the only solid and permanent foundation of character.

No, this universal law of growth through service, this eternal truth that nothing succeeds like success, is neither unjust nor hard. If we look at it aright, we shall see in it the expression of the necessary and beneficent law of character. That law is not an arbitrary enactment of an external and omnipotent ruler; it is the natural working out of a moral principle within ourselves; it is the inevitable expression of our own spiritual life as we direct it toward the good or the evil. To the weak and the unworthy such a law must ever be an object of terror and disheartenment; but to the strong, the earnest, the faithful soul, it is a continual inspiration and a sure promise of ultimate triumph.

Christly Character the Kingdom of God

CHAPTER XV

Christly Character the Kingdom of God

THE POUNDS

Luke 19:11-27

Text.—“*They supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear.*”—Luke 19:11

HERE is an error old as the gospel, new as the morning, and persistent as the power of evil. In outward form it varies with the passing years; in essence it remains ever the same. Men think and speak of the kingdom of God as an immediate creation of the Almighty, wholly external to themselves and independent of the laws and relations of life as they know it. They picture to their minds a new order of society into which we may enter or from which we may be excluded according to the good pleasure of the King. Those first followers of Jesus looked for the establishment of that kingdom upon this earth from material elements. It would simply be a new and greater Roman empire, conquering all others and being established on a permanent and invincible basis. Only in greatness and power would it differ from the kingdoms already existing. We of to-day have put aside that notion as crude and materialistic. But what have we accepted in its place? A future kingdom instead of a present one. We defer the establishment of the kingdom of heaven to a future state, and flatter ourselves that our conception is spiritual.

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Practically, however, the two conceptions are identical. According to both the kingdom is external, it is largely a matter of location and circumstance, and the question of citizenship rests with a Power outside ourselves; is, in short, a matter of favor or grace. How many persons still talk of "salvation" as though it meant getting into heaven! Again and again we hear them say that they will "take their chances," evidently supposing that their relation to the heavenly kingdom will be determined by the King on conditions more or less arbitrary and uncertain. In all cases it is the same error, viz., the expectation that the kingdom of God will *appear*, i. e., that it will assume some external form and will consist of institutions and orders and classes of society to be entered from without.

To this persistent error we have a permanent answer in the parable of The Pounds. And this parable comes to us to-day with all the directness and significance that characterized its original utterance.

At the basis of the parable lies a historic incident. On the death of Herod the Great his son Archelaus went to Rome to secure the appointment as successor to his kingdom. At the same time there went from Judea an embassy of citizens to oppose the appointment. The principal result of their effort was to increase the cruelty which they sought to avert. This incident was of course familiar to our Lord's hearers, and would give added significance to the lesson which he drew from it. Furthermore, this historic framework marks the unquestionable individuality of the parable and clearly distinguishes it from all others.

In not a few minds the parable of The Pounds has been confused with that of The Talents, and they have been looked upon as two forms of one story. The question has been raised by expositors, Did Jesus really utter two parables so similar in form? Or have we two diverse reports of one story? Scholarly criticism

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has asked the question, but the profoundest scholarship can never answer it. The unanimous agreement of scholars would prove nothing on either side. And what need? As they come to us the parables are certainly not one but two, revealing distinct features, embodying distinct messages. The two messages are equally true, equally divine. We cannot confuse them without loss. We cannot spare either one.

Despite a general similarity the two parables present several points of sharp and significant contrast; and a careful study serves to emphasize the points of contrast rather than those of similarity. While the parable of The Pounds is palpably suggestive of the historic incident already referred to, there is no hint of such historic basis in the parable of The Talents. The limited parallelism of the two stories serves to bring out as nothing else could certain contrasted truths regarding human life.

In the parable of The Talents we have set forth inequality of gifts with equality of service. In that of The Pounds this condition is reversed, and we have equality of gifts with inequality of service. The story of The Talents offers a simple contrast between faithfulness and unfaithfulness. The story of The Pounds embodies a more complex idea. Its fourfold distinction suggests numberless gradations between perfect loyalty and open hostility. Moreover, the one parable ends with a general statement of reward and penalty, while the other shows the exact proportion between service and reward. And finally, the parable of The Pounds contains an element not found at all in the parable of The Talents, i. e., the distinction between servants and citizens.

If we have clearly distinguished in our minds the individuality of the two parables, let us analyze the picture before us.

The story opens with an equal distribution of money to the servants of the king, one pound to each, as he

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is about to depart on a mission of importance. The group of unfriendly citizens who send a committee to oppose his petition is added to complete the picture and to round out its lesson.

The parable of The Talents, by its unequal distribution of money, "to one five talents, to another two, and to another one," represents the inequalities of gift and environment and heredity which characterize different individuals as they come into the world. The fact of such inequality no one can question. Its significance we have already considered in the study of the other parable. The parable of The Pounds, on the other hand, calls attention to the truth that, while there is a real and important difference in men, there is a sense in which all are absolutely equal. All cannot accomplish an equal work in the world, but each one has an equal chance with all his fellows to *do his best*, to make the most of that which he has.

The robin cannot by most strenuous effort become an eagle, but he can be a perfect robin. A Kitto, reared in an almshouse, cannot vie with the university graduate in learning and grace, but he can hew out from such materials as he has a saintly character and can leave a work that shall bless his fellow men. A bootblack and an artist differ widely in gifts and environment, but it is the equal privilege of each to be the best in his sphere. The limitations of the one need not hinder him from giving the very best polish in the city, nor can the natural talents and beautiful surroundings of the other excuse him for any failure to produce the best work of which he is capable. In this they are equal. "She hath done what she could" is the record of perfect achievement, and it is a record equally possible for all.

Then why should any man stand idly about complaining, "I have no chance in the world"? Man, you have a chance to do your best! No man has more. In this you are the peer of the millionaire, though you have but

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two mites, the peer of the scholar, though you cannot read, the peer of the genius, though you may be a plodder all your days. Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Emerson, Washington, did no more, could do no more. Nay, with reverence be it said, Jesus Christ himself could do no more. You have looked at life long enough exclusively through the parable of The Talents. Its picture of inequality has blinded you to the larger truth. Change your lens and look for a time through the parable of The Pounds. Note the equalities. You have only one pound? No more had others. The partition was exactly equal. The chance to make the most of yourself, that is what is common to all. The best with what you have, that is the divine requirement for all alike. Who does that is perfect. Who fails to do that, though he may make a great show of achievement, cannot secure the approval of his conscience or his God. Let us emphasize this truth. Only a shallow and superficial judgment measures worth by achievement alone. Faithfulness, desire, purpose, these are the units of measurement that God uses.

Starting from this point, we are next confronted by the fact that the possible spiritual attitudes or relations to God are not two but four; or, to be more exact, there are four attitudes portrayed in such a manner as to suggest many. In a word, spiritual gradations are numberless. The four attitudes represented in our parable are these: (a) perfect fidelity, (b) easy mediocrity, (c) fatal inactivity, (d) open hostility.

When the king returns from his journey the servants of his household are called to account, and three typical cases are recorded.

First comes one and proudly renders his account;—"Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds." By common consent this man represents perfect faithfulness. He has used his opportunities to the full. He has been diligent, careful, wise and faithful. The master rec-

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ognizes his faithfulness and responds with hearty words of approval. "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities."

How pleasing to the servant must have been this declaration of his lord's approval! Yet it was only what the man's own conscience had already uttered. He knew that he had been faithful. He knew that he had made the most possible with his pound. And that is the privilege of every one of us, to know when we are faithful. Our faithfulness may not always win the recognition and approval of men; but that need not trouble us. There is no uncertainty, no inscrutability in the judgments of God. They are always in perfect harmony with the real declarations of conscience. Who would know God's thoughts regarding his life and conduct has only to be honest with himself. If you want it in Bible phrase, here it is. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

Now comes the second servant. His statement is, "Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds." Now do not make the mistake of identifying this man with the two talent man of the other parable. They are not moral equivalents. Rather do they embody a vital point of difference between the parables that is often overlooked. The achievement of the man with two talents was equally praiseworthy with that of the man with ten talents; for each had gained a hundred per cent on his trust. But in the parable we are now studying, the first man had gained one thousand per cent, while the second had gained but five hundred. The gain in both cases is large, and readily wins popular applause. Nevertheless, the gain of this second man, large as it is when considered by itself, does not represent complete faithfulness. It was possible to realize a thousand per cent and he has earned but five hundred per cent. The first, therefore,

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represents the limit of possibility through untiring service; the second, easy-going mediocrity.

As this man makes his statement, you notice the absence of approving words which had greeted the report of his fellow. It is not, "Well, thou good servant"; but simply, "Be thou also over five cities." In this case also the words of the king are but an echo of the declaration of the man's own conscience. He knew as well as his master that he had not been as devoted and industrious as his fellow servant. He had taken more time for his own pleasure, had not worked so hard nor so long, had required more frequent holidays and shorter hours of labor. His reward of five cities is exactly proportioned to his achievement; and he enters upon his new term of service with a good degree of outward honor, but without that inspiration and joy that come from the consciousness of absolute faithfulness.

This part of the story emphasizes a very significant point of difference between human judgment and the divine, between the popular estimate of service and the true estimate of conscience. We ask, What has a man done? And if he has gained five hundred or a thousand per cent on his original investment of education or talent or money, we praise him unstintedly. But God asks, not, What has he gained? but, How faithful has he been? Has he gained all that he might have gained? Has he used his gifts to the utmost? Not accumulation but activity, not display but devotion, is the divine measure of merit.

But here comes the third man. His report is practically identical with that of the third man in the parable of The Talents. "Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin." Then follows the excuse, "I knew thee that thou art an hard man," etc. Why an excuse at all? The master has not spoken a word of blame. He has not questioned the servant's faithfulness. But conscience has been speaking all

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along. In this man's heart has been sounding the words that the king is about to utter, "Thou wicked servant!" Again and again he has felt the call of duty, "Thou oughtest to have put my money into the bank that it might have been accumulating interest." The servant knew what he ought to do; but he deliberately chose idleness with the disapproval of conscience. The inevitable result follows—the loss of his pound. His master had only required of him what his conscience told him he could fulfil. He neglected what he himself recognized as his simple duty, and now the power to do is taken from him.

Again it is the universal law: you must use or lose. The worst feature of both condemnation and judgment lies in the fact that they are in perfect accord with the declarations of conscience. Every man whom God condemns is first self-condemned. The divine judgment is invariably preceded by a human excuse.

A fourth class of persons appears in this parable that is not found in the parable of The Talents. This class is represented by citizens hostile to the king, who oppose his elevation to the throne and are put to death upon his return. The act of the king is that of a vindictive tyrant. In that it does not truthfully represent the character of God nor the spirit of his dealings with men; nevertheless this part of the story serves to illustrate a great truth. Resistance to divine law always means disaster or destruction. You cannot defy a law of nature without inviting physical destruction. Equally true is it that spiritual disaster follows surely upon any neglect or defiance of God's spiritual laws. A man casts himself from some lofty eminence, defying the law of gravitation, and he is dashed to pieces as he strikes the rocks below. No less sure is the moral destruction of a Burr or an Arnold who hurls himself from the pinnacle of honor in defiance of the laws of righteousness.

To bring out this truth is not, however, the primary

reason for the introduction of the hostile citizens. Its more immediate purpose is to complete the outline of possible attitudes towards God, and to make more clear the precise position of the three servants. In the contrast between citizens and servants we have a suggested distinction between disciples and those who do not acknowledge any allegiance to Christ. The three servants stand for three classes of Christians, three distinct planes of spiritual living.

All Christians are not alike. There are Christians and Christians. One Christian differs from another Christian not alone in glory but also in character and blessing. Salvation is a great thing or a little thing according to our attitude toward it. As the gospel comes to us from Christ it is absolutely the same for all. All have the same promises, the same privileges. The new birth, the baptism of the Spirit, and all the progressive experiences of the Christian life are offered in exactly equal measure to each individual disciple; but the actual revelations of joy and peace and spiritual power vary indefinitely.

Whence comes this difference? Why do we see one Christian developing a saintly character, living a happy Christian life, entering into the higher experiences of discipleship, and winning many souls for the Master, while his neighbor makes little or no progress, finds no delight but only hardship in his service, reaps little fruit from his labor? It is solely a question of faithfulness. Here is a man whose pound has gained ten pounds. He is busy and hard at work, but he is happy in the midst of his toil and sacrifice because he has the continual approval of conscience. He knows that he is perfectly faithful; he cannot help knowing it. There are others who make considerable progress and are fairly busy in the kingdom, yes, who manifest a growing saint-hood and not a little achievement; yet they fail of com-

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plete satisfaction because they have not the witness of conscience that they are doing their full duty.

Yet others there are who have enlisted in the service of the King. They are known to the world as Christians. They are members of the Church. They cherish a fond hope of salvation. But they are making no use whatever of the gifts and promises of God. The riches of the gospel they allow to remain shut up within the covers of a book which is to them so sacred that they rarely open it. All their time, their energy, their thought, their ambition, are devoted to themselves. To them God appears as a hard Master requiring the impossible of men, and demanding the sacrifice of the best things now in return for doubtful blessings hereafter. They are full of apologies and excuses. You never meet them but they have a word of explanation to offer for some failure in service or duty. What wonder if they soon lose the hope that they cherished at the first? What wonder if they continually sing —

“Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?”

What wonder if they have much to say about “crosses,” and little about new experiences?

So this parable of The Pounds, though not directly introduced as a parable of the kingdom of heaven, proves to be really in that class. It is a picture of character building; and this is what it tells us: Character is not simply good or bad, Christly or unchristly. There are infinite gradations of Christliness. There is character that results from making the most of one's opportunities, the character that affords the supreme satisfaction of an approving conscience; and there is character that is in a greater or less degree Christlike and yet does not fill up the measure of its possibilities. More than this, there is a form of Christianity that contents

itself with declaring itself on the side of Christ and then leaves all the commands and promises and possibilities of the Christian life sealed up within the covers of the Bible—a Christianity that will lose itself at the last.

It is not enough, then, for any man to ask and to answer the question, Am I among the servants or the enemies of the King? You may be a servant, a Christian in some real sense, and yet fail to enjoy all that it is your privilege to enjoy. There are those who are saved, “so as by fire.” Or you may be perfectly faithful, having daily the witness of a good conscience, and “so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The kingdom of God will never “appear” to any man, either immediately or remotely. It is a spiritual condition of the soul within, not an institution either material or spiritual to be entered from without. Each one must realize the kingdom in his own soul through the use of whatever opportunities come to his hand; and the glory and gladness of that realization will be in exact proportion to the faithfulness in service. The essence of the kingdom is character, the perfection of the kingdom, the fulness of the stature of Christ; the rewards of the kingdom, dominion and ever increasing power for service.

The Patchwork

CHAPTER XVI

The Patchwork

THE NEW CLOTH IN THE OLD GARMENT

Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36

Text.—“*No man rendeth a piece from a new garment and putteth it upon an old garment.*”—Luke 5:36

AMENDED coat is not the true symbol of a Christian character. That is a new and perfect garment. The religion of the gospel is not a patch put upon the old life to cover or conceal its defects. It is a new life wrought out of new materials, and woven in a fashion wholly new. It is a seamless robe without spot or defect of any kind. Its motives and principles, its forms and expressions, are fresh and unique. They are not borrowed from other sources; they are not copied from other teachers. The acceptance of the Christ life involves the rejection of the old life with all its traditions and ideals. Any attempt to wed the old and the new, any scheme of compromise between them, can only result in the stultification of both. This, in brief, is the truth that Jesus would teach us in The Parable of the Patchwork.

A question of the scribes has revealed one of many false notions regarding our Lord's mission. “Why do the disciples of John fast often, . . . and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?” they ask; for as yet they suppose his teachings to be only an amended Judaism, a sort of appendix de-

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signed to supplement and correct the errors of their own teaching. At most it is but a new and revised edition of the preachings of John the Baptist. Jesus therefore plainly declares to them that he has not come to patch up old failures and to mend old and worn-out systems. Not even to improve and make perfect that which is fairly good in itself, is his purpose; but to make all things new.

The unique character of the Christian life, its absolute newness and independence of all other religious ideals, that is the thought Jesus would emphasize. And he has put it in a form at once unmistakable and suggestive.

He had taught the same truth by implication many times before. Again and again he had avoided the old issues and endeavored to show his hearers that the new alone was vital. To Nicodemus, eager to discuss the credentials of Messiahship, he propounds the doctrine of the New Birth. To the woman of Samaria, mulling over the threadbare question of the proper place for worship, he declares that place is nothing but spirit is everything. To the bigoted religionists, pottering over questions of divine prerogative, he flings out the challenge of divine power, and eclipses the accusation of blasphemy by a manifestation of blessing.

Now he teaches them directly and in terms that are unequivocal. The old religion had its fixed terms for fasting and the like. They suppose that the new will be even more rigorous, continuing the austerities of the old and adding to them. For to their minds religion is essentially a matter of outward forms, a question of doing and abstaining. Jesus declares that whatever may be the forms and exercises of the new religion, they will not be in any sense a continuance of the old. Will his disciples fast? Doubtless they will. That seems to be taken for granted in his great Sermon on the Mount. But their fasting will be essentially different from that of the Pharisees. It will not be a relic of Jewish cere-

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monialism or of the asceticism of John. These at their best were more or less mechanical. They were exercises or privations undertaken as in some way meritorious, and constituting an end in themselves. If there be fasting among his disciples, it will be the spontaneous exhibition of the new life, and so will reveal a new meaning. It will not be a premeditated act of penance or purgation. Rather will it come through the natural preoccupation of an eager soul intent upon some noble purpose that for the time eclipses physical needs. The new doctrine is not to be grafted upon the old stock; its forms of expression, though similar to those already in vogue, are never identical with them. Every word is charged with new meaning. Every custom and method is made a channel of fresh power.

The question of the scribes and of John's disciples is a perennial question and calls for a perennial answer. The ground of questioning may shift, has shifted indefinitely. It may swing all the way around the circle from asceticism to self-indulgence, but it is the same old question still, and it is not at all a question of mere feasting or fasting, but of conformity. Very often, as originally, it is a question of conformity to the accepted religious ideals and standards of the past. Why do not the disciples of to-day think and act and live precisely as did the disciples of the last generation or of the preceding century? In contrast with this, yet inspired by the same spirit, is the question of conformity to the standards of the unchristian world. Why does not the Christian conform his life exactly to the life of men about him excepting only in matters of religious duty?

If a disciple to-day ventures to seek a new and higher religious experience, if he refuses to conform his action and aims to the popular religious ideals of the unchristian world, or if he rejects as worn out the spiritual standards of the past generation, the creeds and forms of the fathers, it causes no less surprise than did a simi-

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lar course of action in our Lord's time. Witness the infinite pains that men, even good and earnest Christian men, have taken to anchor the life and thought of the Christian Church to certain fixed expressions of belief and forms of service. Witness, too, the insistence with which unspiritual disciples applaud the conventional and denounce the unusual in religious activity or worship, so making true the saying of Lowell, "In prosperous times the faith of one generation becomes the formality of the next." "The dead hand" has ever been and still continues to be a serious hindrance to the spiritual progress of the Christian Church. It is the petrified incarnation of the old question of the Pharisees. The world has not yet begun to realize with any adequate degree of clearness the fact that Christianity is a living religion, essentially new in every age and in every soul, and that it must continually find for itself new methods and channels of expression or it will perish.

This questioning and surprise, this inability to comprehend the rejection of the old and the revelation of the new, springs from what we may fitly call the "Patchwork Theory" of Christianity. It grows out of the notion that the Christian life is simply a scheme for mending a broken law, for patching rents in human character, for making up by extra goodness or merit in one sphere the deficiencies of all other parts of life. It is the natural fruit of the idea that religion is a compromise with evil instead of the conquest of evil.

And this patchwork theory has always found a place in the thinking of religious men. It is one of the persistent theories of religion, cropping out in every age and land and constantly getting itself mistaken for divine revelation. Again and again it has appeared in the history of Christianity, and always with the same results.

You know the story of the first great compromise of Christianity with the power and spirit of the world. Eager to hasten the redemption of the empire, the

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Church of Jesus Christ entered into an entangling alliance with the national life of Rome, became the state religion, accepted the protection of the civil power, permitted itself to become a mere limited and partial addition of new life and thought upon the worn and tattered surface of the old heathenism. You know, too, the effect of this compromise. The last state of the Roman empire was worse than the first. The old heathenism scarcely felt the influence of the new religion, while Christianity was rapidly paganized by the customs and principles to which she was forced to give way. Soon the worst cruelties of a pagan Nero were outdone by the barbarities that were perpetrated in the name of Christ, and the shrunken patch of the new religion made unspeakably greater and more ghastly the rents in the old heathenism.

You are familiar also with the story of the bald and blasphemous proclamation of this theory in the days of Martin Luther, when every priest became a peddler of "indulgences," which simply means that he offered for sale at fixed prices patches of ecclesiastical grace of sizes adapted to cover all manner of moral defects and spiritual rents in the human life. Is it strange that under such a system the spirituality of the Church became shrunken, that the moral life of the people sank rapidly to the lowest level, and that the very ministers of religion were leaders in vice and crime, until at length the riddled garment of Romanism was rent in twain by the spirit of the great Reformation?

The outcome is sure. With unvarying monotony, the witness of history confirms our Lord's declaration, "The new piece that filleth it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse." Either the new spiritual life destroys the old forms or it is itself destroyed in the effort for adjustment and conformity.

Nevertheless, this patchwork theory of religion has by no means passed away. It reveals itself in the Chris-

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tian thinking of our own day, and hampers the spiritual growth of disciples as seriously as ever it did. We may detect its presence in at least two forms. First, there are those who still look upon Christianity as a patch inserted to fill up life's incompleteness. And second, there are those who think of the religion of the gospel as a patch to cover life's imperfections.

First, I say, there are those, and they are by no means few, whose ideal of Christianity is that it is a patch to fill up life's incompleteness. Life is considered as a complex whole made up of various elements. The physical, the intellectual and the spiritual are so many departments of the whole which constitutes human life, and each must be developed in due proportion if the manhood is to be complete. Holding this theory, a man is apt to draw the lines very sharply between the religious and the secular in his life, and to see to it that the one shall not trespass upon the sphere of the other. Business is business and is conducted on strictly business principles, that is, upon the principles that unchristian men follow in business. Politics, too, and recreation are outside the sphere of religion and it must not be allowed to control them. Religion is necessary because man has a spiritual nature that must be nourished and developed, but it is one among many, and must keep to its own place. So the man is regular in attendance at church, he may even be zealous in prayer-meeting, but these things are kept strictly apart from the rest of his life. In church work and its collaterals he is animated by the spirit of love and self-sacrifice. His great desire is the salvation of his fellow men. He is benevolent, kind-hearted, unselfish. But when he goes forth from the church into business or society or politics he is animated by the spirit of competition or of self-seeking ambition. Thus it frequently happens that men who are held up by the church as exemplary Christians, and are lauded for their ardent piety and overflowing benevo-

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lence, are utterly unscrupulous and heartless in their business relations and enterprises. Even churches themselves often belie their preaching by the methods and spirit revealed in the transaction of their business affairs.

What wonder that under such circumstances the patch of piety continually shrinks till at length it tears itself wholly away and leaves in life a larger rent than was there at the first! What wonder if the church that preaches such a doctrine is shrinking till it threatens to leave society as a whole with only a large rent where it was!

Again, there are those who look upon Christianity as a patch designed to cover the imperfections of the life and to conceal its defects from the eyes of divine wrath. They are the disciples who delight to preach and to believe some doctrine of the atonement that substitutes the righteousness of Jesus for their own righteousness, which is lacking. They sing, "Jesus paid it all," and then settle down to lives of contented slavery to sin, fondly imagining that that daily repentance covers all the evil doings of the day with a patch of divine forgiveness that makes the garment as good as whole again.

Said a very orthodox but very irascible deacon to a young preacher after a sermon on holiness, "I do not trust for salvation to any righteousness in my life, but to the fact that I always repent of any sin that I commit and pray for forgiveness. Why, I never beat my horse but I am sorry for it afterwards." "My friend," replied the preacher, "if your sorrow doesn't make you quit beating your horse, it will not save you from perdition."

And who will say that there are not many disciples of whom that deacon is a fair type? They see the rents in their own characters, but hope to so conceal them with patches of repentance, or what not, that God shall not see them. Such souls make no spiritual progress. They do not grow in grace. They are not sanctified. How

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can they be? They neither feel the necessity nor understand the possibility of sanctification.

No soul was ever saved by such a doctrine as that. The millennium could not be brought to pass in a million eternities by it. The only tendency of such a view of religion is to make the life worse and worse. As before, the patch that seemed so sufficient when applied, shrinks day by day until at length it is wholly lost out of the life. He who trusts for his salvation to the imputed righteousness of Christ, who imagines that his own unrighteousness is to be concealed at the Judgment Day by the borrowed robe of Christ's righteousness, will eventually lose all interest in righteousness of any kind. Christly character cannot be built up on subterfuges of any kind, however pious, or on shams, however widely approved.

Against this notion of a rent and patched life the Christ of to-day is protesting with many voices. In opposition to the theory that divides life into many and diverse elements the spiritual unity of life is being proclaimed with an insistence hitherto unknown. We are being brought face to face with the truth that one motive, one principle, one law must govern the life in every part, that religion is not a separable element or department of life, but that it is the very essence of life in all its departments, that it is *the* motive, *the* principle, *the* law by which the whole life must be governed and from which the whole must take its character and tone. We cannot long turn a deaf ear to the prophets who are telling us in the Word of God that the same spirit of self-sacrifice which we believe should control in our religious and benevolent work is also the true spirit for business or politics or society. Either we must permit the life to be made wholly new with the spirit of Christ for its warp, or we shall lose our Christianity altogether, and what is left of the old life will be sadly disfigured.

Again, the Christ of to-day demands that all notions

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of imputed character be done away as dishonest in themselves and dishonoring to God. The only righteousness that the moral intelligence of this age can recognize is real righteousness. It finds the significance of gospel salvation, not in the judicial pardon of sin on the ground of an artificial and false judgment, nor in the escape of the guilty one from the penalty of his sin, but in a real and essential victory over sin, in the escape through victory from its power and pollution. The spirit of the times calls for a religion that shall actually make life purer, less selfish, more kindly, that shall transform and transfigure society, that shall enter into all human life and shall bring it into growing conformity to the life of God.

The religion of doctrines and theories does not appeal to burdened and thoughtful men, and they naturally turn away from its outward manifestation in the Church. The old judicial view of sin and salvation, too, is fast passing away, and in place of this marvelous structure of scholasticism and theology is rising the natural view of sin as an actual fact, a force working ruin here and now by natural processes, and calling for some real power, religious or other, that shall heal the disease and remove the difficulty. Unless Christianity proves its divine efficiency in accomplishing this cure, it must pay the penalty of its weakness in gradual but certain disintegration.

All this, however, is remote and general. Let us turn for a few moments to that which is more direct and personal. The parable finds its vital application to every individual life. It utters to each one of us its challenge, What is your ideal of religion? Is it a patch? Is it a partial, shrunken thing? Do you think of religion as merely a section of your life, to be kept quite apart from the rest? Do you trust in it as a cover for your shortcomings in the home, in business, in society, and in the countless other relations of life? Do

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you hope by religious zeal and churchly activity to conceal dishonesty or greed or impurity or unkindness from the eye of God, so that you shall appear before the judgment seat as holy when in fact your life has been very unholy?

Oh, listen to the message of the Christ as it comes to you through this parable! The Christian life is not a mere compromise with the old life of sin. It is not a little of the new on the surface while a great deal of the old remains underneath, as wretched and as imperfect as ever. It is not a poor, mended, unsightly cloak, to be thrown over the life. It is a new life, wholly new, a complete life, a life wholly distinct from the old. It is a life that grows more and more into harmony with the divine life of God.

Listen to the same message as it is interpreted by St. Paul. "If any man be in Christ"—what? "old things shall be mended and patched"? "old things shall be somewhat improved"?—No! no! "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The Expansive Force of Living Experience

CHAPTER XVII

The Expansive Force of Living Experience

THE NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37,38

Text.—“*No man putteth new wine into old bottles.*”—Luke 5:37

LIFE implies variety, progress. Monotony is lifelessness. The lifeless creations of man inevitably bear the trade-mark of monotony. He makes a coin, and then from the same die turns out hundreds of thousands of other coins that are identical with the first in every respect. He makes a watch, and of myriads sent out from the same factory no man can distinguish one from another unless by means of the number stamped upon it. Even the brain creations of the dreamers, the thinkers, the artists, with all their freshness and originality, reveal a certain underlying sameness which we call style. The style of an author, the school of an artist, what is either but the monotony that tinges and limits the variety of his work? For man does not possess the power of infinite variation; he has not discovered the secret of life.

How different is it with the living creations of God! Who would ever speak or even think of the *style* of a divine creation? There is infinite variety without a hint of repetition or limitation. Among all the countless millions of the human race, no two faces can be found that are absolutely identical; how much less two entire per-

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sonalities. In the vegetable world every tree and plant, yes and every minutest leaf or twig has its distinct individuality. No two smallest flowers alike, no two commonest blades of grass precisely the same. Each embodiment of life is a fresh creation, absolutely new and unique.

As men differ in face or form, so also do they differ in mind, feeling, disposition, temperament. Never in the history of the race have there been two identical souls; never two mental or spiritual experiences that were exact duplicates the one of the other; for these, too, are the living creations of God and partake of his infinite nature. The life that has entered into fellowship with the divine cannot but be progressive and ever new.

This is the point at issue between two antagonistic views of religion. The one regards religion as a human invention, a lifeless system of service, and consequently to be cast in certain rigid molds of form and ceremony. The other sees religion as a divine creation, pulsating with an ever new and growing life that cannot be restrained within fixed bounds or limited by hard and fast rules of conduct. In the one view religion is a mechanical fulfilment of prescribed rites; in the other, it is "the life of God in the soul of man." The history of religion among men is a history of the struggle between these two ideals, and all religious progress results from the triumph of the divine and the living over the human and the formal.

This, also, is one of the points involved in the question with which the scribes and Pharisees and the disciples of John challenge Jesus. "Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?" To the minds of his questioners religion is chiefly a matter of forms and ceremonies, of fastings and prayers; and they expect that Christianity will be only a new coin pressed out from the old die. Possibly it may reveal some new

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elements; but surely it will be in essence and in externals for the most part like that which they have already known. If there be anything new in its spirit and teaching, surely these will be embodied in the old symbols, they will express themselves through the familiar channels.

To this element of the question, Jesus replies, "No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved."

To those who heard him, the meaning of the parable or simile would be perfectly clear. The old bottles, or wine-skins, dry, hard, easily cracked, and containing the seeds of fermentation which would set free the very force that should burst them, well represents the lifeless and rigid forms of the old religion. The new wine, fresh from the grapes and filled with the mysterious life of the vine, is a fitting type of a living, enthusiastic, expanding Christian experience. Just as surely as the new wine with the expansive force of its fermentation would break the dried and lifeless skins, so surely would the growing life of the new religion refuse to be confined within the rigid but feeble mold of the ancient forms; and if the attempt were made to repress it, the priceless spiritual energy would break its prison and run to waste. On the other hand, the new wine-skins, strong, elastic, pliable, stand for the new forms, the spontaneous service in which the fresh spiritual life may work freely and fully, thus attaining the ripeness of Christian experience and giving true performance to Christian service.

Briefly, then, the thought of the parable is this:—Every genuine religious life is essentially a new creation. True Christianity is a living, expanding, overflowing energy. It cannot be reduced to fixed forms and expressed in set phrases, but continually demands new channels of action and fresh modes of expression. Every

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great revival that has swept over the Christian Church has been marked by phenomena peculiar to itself and unlike those manifested in previous awakenings. The tide of uprising spiritual life has cut a new channel for itself as it has flowed onward, and only as men have been willing to accept this new channel has the blessing poured into their lives. The effort to embody this living spiritual force in the rigid limitations of a decadent formalism has always resulted in disaster to the forms and in waste of spiritual power.

"No man putteth new wine into old bottles." True enough. A single experiment of this kind in what we term "the natural world," is sufficient to convince men of the folly of it, and ever afterwards they act more wisely. But in the spiritual world our wits work more slowly, proving again and again the truth of our Lord's saying, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The religionists of every age seem to be possessed of a mania for saving the old bottles of phrase and form and trying to force into them the new wine of the ever growing spiritual life. According to the persistent notion, the wine is made for the bottle, not the bottle for the wine. The lifeless form is magnified till it seems more important than the spiritual life; and it is really astonishing with what tenderness we cling to some of these empty and worthless bottles long after the last drop of spiritual wine has flowed from their gaping seams.

There are to-day in the Christian Church enough of these old bottles to stock a spiritual apothecary's shop, and not a few eager but belated saints are diligently trying to bottle up in them the effervescent spiritual life of the unfolding twentieth century. Look at them all neatly arranged on the churchly shelves and labeled with the neatest of churchly labels—old bottles of thought, old bottles of action, old bottles of expression.

There on the upper shelf, far above the reach of the

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babes in Christ, are the old bottles of *thought*, "Creeds" we call them. What a long row! All sorts and sizes from the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed down to the Cambridge Platform and even to the creed of 1883: and nearly every one of these bottles, I think I may say every one of them, has a crack in it somewhere through which the wine has burst out.

From earliest times the Church has sought to formulate Christian truth systematically and permanently, and to make these creeds or statements of doctrine the standards of Christian thought for all succeeding generations. One council of the Fathers even went so far as positively to declare at the end of the creed which it had formulated, "Unless a man believe every part of this creed, he shall no doubt perish everlastingly." Each of these creeds has stood for a greater or less period as the ultimate standard of orthodoxy in Christian thinking, and each in turn has been given up after a severe struggle only when the independent spirit of a growing religious life has refused longer to be restrained and hampered by the rigidity of obsolete expression.

Religious beliefs, like all other products of the human mind, are subject to the process of evolution. Change, not fixity, is the law of faith. Minds differ. Every generation looks at truth from a new standpoint. The experience and needs of every succeeding age are essentially new. The truth of one generation becomes the untruth of the next, unless it is newly expressed and freshly applied. It is not more necessary to keep our text-books of science carefully revised and brought up to date than it is to keep the thought of the disciple abreast of his advancing experience. Our beliefs are the outgrowth of our experience. A fixed belief therefore betokens an experience petrified or stagnated.

So these carefully arranged creeds, these symbols of Christian truth that have been wrought out of much pray-

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er and study and even angry debate, have been abandoned one by one and permitted to give place to others expressing later and more mature thought which should be set aside in their turn or even destroyed. The process has become well-nigh monotonous in its frequent repetition, yet men are slow to learn the lesson, and each new generation seems to look upon its own belief as the final form of truth's expression and to cling to it as persistently and to insist upon its acceptance as dogmatically as though it had not utterly repudiated the right of its predecessors to do the same. And so the contest between orthodoxy and heresy continues, quite regardless of the fact that the heresy of yesterday is ever the orthodoxy of to-day, and the heresy of to-day will as surely be the orthodoxy of to-morrow.

Were the only evil results of this protracted struggle the destruction of the creeds and the heart-burnings of their defenders, that would be a comparatively trifling matter. The bottles can well be spared. But when we think of the enormous waste of the new wine of the kingdom, of the spiritual power that has been lost, of the spiritual experience that has been hampered and misdirected, of the spiritual lives that have been blighted, who can ever estimate the damage that has been done?

Then, too, there are the old bottles of *action*. There are fixed rules of conduct by which certain disciples would seek to determine for themselves and for all their fellow Christians just what occupations and recreations are proper for a follower of the Christ. Always we may find those Christians who think that religion consists in doing certain things and not doing other certain things, and who are ready to map out with precision the conduct of every Christian life, making each life as like every other life as are different coins from the same die.

Those Judaizers who sought to lay a heavy burden of rules and duties upon the shoulders of the new converts in Asia Minor have had their imitators in every age and

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land. They are the disciples who measure every Christian life by the yard-stick of their own conscience, and cut every Christian duty by the pattern of their own service; who believe that no one can be a true Christian who does not do just as they do and feel just as they feel. Such were the well-meaning persons of John Bunyan's day who haunted his soul in his boyhood days with the idea that he had committed a grievous sin and imperiled his soul's eternal salvation every time he played the innocent game of "tip-cat." Such, too, were those of the Puritans who loaded the Sabbath with duties and restrictions that made the day a trial and a weariness to all who were not fashioned after the Puritan model in spirit and in temper.

Do we not find some even in our own time who expect the religious life of youth to take precisely the same form as that of mature age? Are there none who look with suspicion upon the Christian Endeavor movement and similar forms of religious activity, because all the members of these modern organizations do not fall in with the established and conventional methods of the Christian Church? Then, too, the saint of threescore years cares nothing for recreation or amusement. His blood is thin, his muscles are stiff, he has passed through many long years of toil and trial, consequently his religious feeling seeks expression in quiet and even solemn forms. Too often he expects the young disciple with an abundance of animal spirits and an overflowing enthusiasm to mold his life after the same staid fashion, and frowns upon all jollity and mirth as tokens of an unregenerate condition.

The repeated "Thou shalt not" of Sinai is an old bottle to-day. The new bottle of the gospel is labeled, "Thou shalt." The old bottle is manufactured from precepts, the new from principles. And it is unspeakably better to leave even the young disciple to work out the application of these principles in his own mind and life

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than it is to cramp him and condemn him to perpetual spiritual infancy by multiplying precepts.

I verily believe that many an honest purpose to serve Christ and many a devout aspiration to a higher life has been wholly dissipated by the fruitless effort of youth to conform itself to a type of religious action and service fitted only to mature years. The new wine of youthful experience could not compress itself within the old bottles of mature habit and aged seriousness, and so the bottles burst and the wine was spilled.

Once, again, I have spoken of the bottles of *expression*. How we delight to bottle up our religion in certain pet phrases! We catch some well-turned sentence from the lips of a living, working Christian, and straightway we adopt it as the vehicle of our own thought or feeling. It may be a choice form of prayer or a crisp and expressive bit of testimony or a pungent word of exhortation. Whatever it is, it answers the purpose very well so long as the experience which we put into it is sufficiently old. But fresh experience, living desire, or aspiration or enthusiasm cannot be thrust into any of these old forms. They will require for their utterance new phrases, fresh and unworn forms of expression.

As a young man Mr. Moody lived in Boston, and it was in that city that he began his Christian life. Afterwards he went to Chicago and there gave himself to the service of God in a more complete consecration and made rapid progress in Christian life and experience. Returning to Boston after an absence of fifteen years for the purpose of undertaking important evangelistic work, he assembled the Christian people of the churches in a great meeting for preparation. As the meeting drew to a close he said to them, "Why, the Christian people of Boston are praying the same old prayers that they were praying fifteen years ago when I lived in the city! Is it strange that sinners are not converted when the saints are not making any progress in Christian experience?"

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Very soon after the revival began to take effect those old prayers disappeared and new ones began to take their place. That is always one of the first signs of a genuine revival—the people begin to pray new prayers and to bring new testimonies and fresh suggestions to the prayer-meetings. Just as soon as souls begin to be awakened and to have new desires and new experiences and a new enthusiasm, these will surely begin to express themselves in new forms of speech. The elegant old prayers that have been used for a lifetime, yes, that have many of them been handed down from father to son for generations, will be cast aside and there will be a living freshness about every prayer that will impress itself upon all who hear it. It will be a direct and simple expression of immediate personal needs.

Who has not seen these old bottles of prayer and testimony and exhortation burst into fragments by the coming of a great revival that filled every soul with a new and living experience and that pressed upon all with new desires and fresh purposes?

Oh, we are very careful of the bottles; but of what value are they? They are nothing in themselves. The wine, *the wine*, that is the important thing. In other words, the outward form, whether in thought or action or expression, is wholly subordinate. The matter of vital importance, the only important matter, is the spiritual experience and life, the growing, expanding Christ-life in the soul. If we but make sure of that, it will discover for itself some fitting form of embodiment and expression.

The parable suggests to every hearer two pertinent questions. First, your ideal of religion, what is it? A collection of old bottles waiting to be filled with lifeless liquor? Are you trying to conform your life to certain fixed standards that men have styled Christian? Are you striving to school your mind to some fixed statement of belief (the "deep sleep of a settled conviction"),

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your conduct to a prescribed standard of action, your speech to approved forms of expression? In a word, are you thinking first and chiefly of certain outward forms that have obtained recognition in the Christian world at large and are commonly approved as religious and proper? That is the ideal of the scribes and Pharisees. The word of the Master is, "Seek first and above all else the new wine of a living spiritual experience. Have done with the old forms. Never mind the external. Put the life first and above all, and when you have made sure of that, let it clothe itself and express itself in whatsoever forms are best adapted to it. Let the forms be as new and as elastic as the life which they contain."

In the second place, your religious experience, how does it express itself? Does it fall naturally and easily into old forms and familiar phrases? Are you in bondage to these? Does it never call for the use of an unfamiliar word or the performance of an unconventional act? As to thought, are you simply repeating the thoughts of past generations? As to action, are you quite content with the popular standards of life and service? As to expression, do you find yourself falling into stereotyped forms of prayer and of testimony, borrowing the ready-made forms of others? Have a care! The wine is getting old, or the old bottles would not so readily contain it.

Such is not the true Christian life. That, says our Lord, is new, living, expanding, effervescing, a fresh supply every year, a novel experience every day, a constant discovery, a ceaseless progress. Do not rest in the idle satisfaction of the half-intoxicated feaster, saying, "The old is better"; but come day by day and let your soul be filled with the new wine of the kingdom fresh from the vintage of Calvary.

Self-satisfied Conservatism

CHAPTER XVIII

Self-satisfied Conservatism

THE REVELER

Luke 5:39

Text.—“*He saith, The old is good.*”—Luke 5:39

CONSERVATISM is of two kinds. There is a strong and intelligent conservatism that acts upon human thought like the ballast upon a vessel or the brake upon a coach, checking its career only to render its forward movement more steady, safe and permanent, and there is a stupid and self-satisfied conservatism that is like the ball and chain upon the ankles, helping nothing and hindering all rapid or effectual progress, all worthy achievement—the symbol, in short, of bondage. The one recognizes clearly the value of established opinions and past achievement, and makes of these stepping-stones to higher things and nobler thoughts in the present and for the future. The other, content with the riches inherited from the past, makes of them a barricade to close the pathway of future progress.

It is this inertia of a stupid and self-satisfied conservatism that Jesus portrays in his brief sketch of the half-drunken reveler. Already he has spoken two parables illustrating different phases of the general topic; now he adds the capstone to the pyramid and makes it complete. As we study the picture we discover in it a most vivid expression of the truth which has since passed into

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a proverb, viz., *The worst enemy of the better is the good.* The cause of human progress is less endangered by the positive opposition of evil than by the negative satisfaction with lesser good.

This inertia of contentment crops out in the most trifling matters. The old coat, the old shoes, the old dress,—how we cling to these long after the new have been purchased and hang in the wardrobe ready for our use! Propriety, respectability, perhaps even health calls for the adoption of the new, but we enjoy the easy comfort to which we have become accustomed, and we still think that “the old is the good.”

In matters more vital the same spirit reveals itself with effects proportionately more disastrous. The progress of the industrial world is wrought through a continuous struggle with blind conservatism. Every new idea, every novel invention, has been compelled to win its way to popular acceptance in the face of bitter opposition. Not a machine, however marvelous in its working or beneficent in its product, but has been decried as the enemy of the working man or as inferior to instruments already in use. Your Hargraves or your Arkwright, offering to mankind machines of more value than all the wealth of the Indies, has met with suspicion and calumny and even with violence from both workmen and employers, who with one voice have cried, “The old is the good.”

In the realm of science and education, where, if anywhere, we should expect receptive minds and the progressive spirit, not alone new theories but clearest demonstrations as well are confronted with this inertia of conservative thought that is slow to give them a place and to make use of the truth which they reveal. Copernicus makes discoveries that revolutionize the science of astronomy, and the ghost of old Ptolemy is conjured up to haunt and oppose him. Harvey finds the key to the circulation of the blood, and many of his learned con-

temporaries confront him with the ancient notions of Aristotle. Darwin and Huxley propound the doctrine of evolution, and are denounced as infidels on the authority of Moses. For scholars are no less prone than others to join in the cry, "The old is the good."

Oh, yes, that is the spirit of the Old World! But America is the New World and the American people are a new people. Everything is new with us, so as a matter of course we shall find a wholly different spirit ruling here. Shall we? shall we? What, did you never hear any one right here in America sighing for "the good old times"? If the talk is of statesmen, they will hark back to Jefferson and Adams and Hamilton; if it is of preachers, they will tell you of Edwards and Payson and Nettleton; if of orators, they will remind you of Patrick Henry and Choate and Webster; if of social queens, they will run over the list of colonial dames from Dorothy Hancock to Martha Washington; and they are sure that the present age cannot show the equal of any of these. Speak of social conditions and they will paint dismal pictures of the decadence of our rural communities and the moral degeneracy of our cities. Agitators loudly insist upon the superiority of former industrial conditions, and Christian preachers often descant in glowing terms upon the transcendent piety of the Pilgrim fathers and the holy calm of the Puritan Sabbath.

It were difficult to find a person of advanced age who will acknowledge that conditions, social, political, industrial or religious are as good at the present time as they were in his youth. For even in this new country and amid the new manifestations of the most wondrous progress one may continually hear the echo of those maudlin words, "The old is the good."

Jesus was an innovator. Progress was the very essence of his gospel. To make all things new was his declared purpose. His teaching was more than revolutionary: it was evolutionary. That is to say, it meant

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not merely the overturning of the old and the introduction of the new once for all, but a perpetual overturning, a continuous revelation of new truth, a fresh gospel for every age, a new experience for every generation; yes, an untried pathway for every individual and every day.

What wonder, then, that he met with continual and bitter opposition from scribes and Pharisees? They were the embodiments of conservatism in its worst form. The tradition of the elders was their one standard of truth, their ideal of religion and life. To maintain that tradition intact was their chief aim. Jesus permitted his disciples unrebuked to disregard tradition. They ate with unwashed hands. They plucked the heads of wheat on the Sabbath. They were indifferent in the matter of fasting. They neglected numberless points that these sticklers considered vital. And Jesus seemed to encourage rather than to restrain them. Such an attitude towards ancient and accepted ideals aroused prejudice in the minds of the rulers. They closed their minds and hearts and utterly refused to give the new doctrine a hearing. It was new and that was with them enough to condemn it. On that ground alone it was rejected and its Exponent was crucified.

At an early period in our Lord's ministry this predilection for the old and distrust of the new finds expression in specific questioning. "Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?" A small matter truly and of trifling import in itself. Yet the question is a telltale straw. It betrays the current of a narrow conservatism that is to hamper the work of the Redeemer at every step with disputes about the Sabbath or the law or authority or what not; consequently he replies to its cavil with a threefold group of parables, brief, cogent, effective. In the first two parables of the triad he clearly exposes their false notions regarding his gospel and unhesitatingly declares its newness. He has

not come to patch up an old and worn-out system of religion, nor to pour new spiritual life into old forms and ceremonies. He has come to make all things new. The new life demands new systems and new forms.

He adds this third parable to show that their conservatism is not that wise and commendable reverence for the best things of the past that makes for safe and permanent progress in the present, but rather a senseless and besotted content with the old that beclouds the mind with prejudice and blocks the pathway of all advancement. The two preceding parables recognize a spirit of honest inquiry that animates some of his questioners. This third exposes and rebukes the spirit of self-satisfied prejudice that is too clearly revealed in others.

The inertia of a stupid and self-satisfied conservatism—have those ancient scribes and Pharisees a monopoly of this spirit? Unfortunately not. The same spirit has found a lodgment in many a Christian heart, and abides even to the present day in the Christian Church. Every advance movement of spiritual thought and life has been compelled to do battle with it before it has won recognition and authority among the leaders of the Christian world. Always there are those, and always too they are in the majority, who cling with a blind devotion to past ideals and established precedents, who revere time-honored customs and methods, who plant their faith upon received interpretations of the gospel and are indignant when some eager student of divine truth or some daring explorer in the realm of Christian experience dares to announce a fresh revelation or new discovery of truth.

History is in the main a record of wars and strife. In this respect the history of the Christian Church is no exception to the general rule. The struggles that have wrought out the web of Church history have been exceedingly monotonous in character though waged on many different fields. We may almost say that it has been but one struggle often changing front and moving from field

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to field with the progress of the ages. It is the struggle between orthodoxy and heresy, in which orthodoxy is the name arrogated to itself by received opinion, while heresy is the new thought just dawning and clamoring for recognition. As a rule the heresy of one century becomes the orthodoxy of the next, and too often its advocates repeat the folly of their early opponents by rejecting yet newer and more advanced thought while they, too, say, "The old is the good."

In tracing the course of the running warfare that has been carried on in our own land between "New school" and "Old school" theologians, one is obliged to take his bearings frequently in order that he may know precisely what phase of "Old school" or "New school" he is reading about, since the "New school" of yesterday is the "Old school" of to-day, and the "New school" of to-day will certainly be the "Old school" of to-morrow. A Nettleton or a Lyman Beecher preaches a gospel message born of fresh thought and living experience, and he is confronted with prejudice and suspicion. He is a "New Light," and hears on every side the exclamation, "The old is the good," "The old is the good." At length the vigor of his heaven-born preaching prevails, and his comes to be the accepted doctrine. Then he in turn opposes the preaching of a Finney who is the herald of yet more advanced thought, and to the newer truth responds with the familiar protest, "The old is the good."

I doubt if ever there was a Christian preacher giving to his people messages born out of a living and growing experience of divine love who has not been perpetually hounded by a few ultra-conservative church-members clamoring for the "old gospel," and criticizing his utterances as dangerously novel and sensational. When men speak thus of the "old gospel," they invariably mean the hackneyed phrases and doctrinal statements to which they have been accustomed from childhood.

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Within the memory of men now living they used to sing—

“The old-time religion
Is good enough for me.”

Although the hymn has now fallen into disuse, unfortunately its spirit still survives in many minds. Not long ago a young man preaching in a village in the state of New York found the older members of the church always ready to speak of the great revival that took place in that village under the preaching of Charles G. Finney more than sixty years before. According to their unanimous testimony the preaching and spiritual life of the present day were not to be compared with what was then witnessed. Of course there was little encouragement for the most devoted preacher to labor when his every effort only aroused the cry, “The old is the good.”

More recently in a progressive Massachusetts city a church has just called a new pastor, and at his installation service the chairman of the candidating committee, giving a public report of the work done in seeking a pastor, said that at the outset the committee determined not to consider any man who held new views regarding the Bible, but to find one sound in the faith who would preach the old gospel without any modern additions or improvements. What position could be more absurd? One need not be a radical or tainted with the “higher criticism” to see that such an attitude is fatal to spiritual freedom and progress. Alas, the spirit of the half-intoxicated reveler survives in the Christian Church and mutters ever the one refrain, “The old is the good.”

To intelligent and wise conservatism the religion of to-day owes a debt of gratitude; but the conservatism that absolutely closes eye and mind to all things new is wholly out of harmony with the spirit of Jesus Christ. So profound a thinker as Bacon has said, “They that reverence too much old times are but a scorn to the new.”

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We are wont to think of this blind and self-satisfied conservatism as characteristic of dull minds and of souls that have never known the joy and power of a new experience. And so it is. The indifferent, the lethargic, the conventional are always content with the old, satisfied with present good or even want of good. But when we have said this we have not told the whole truth. We have not even touched the truth on its most troublesome side. The most progressive souls are not free from the influence of this spirit. Strange it may be, nevertheless it is true, that self-satisfied conservatism is a peculiar danger of radically progressive minds. How, do you ask? Partly as a result of reaction from radicalism; chiefly through the intoxication of enthusiasm for a good cause.

What more natural, nay, almost inevitable, than that one who has thrown himself with all his might into the advocacy of some newly discovered truth should become so filled with the spirit of that truth that it should at length seem to him the greatest and most vital truth ever revealed? At first he must press forward against the opposition of older conservatism; and with victory comes a certain intoxication of success. The importance of his revelation takes complete possession of his mind. Now some prophet of yet higher and more advanced truth appears. But the battle spirit is on and the challenge remains posted to hold the field against all comers. Utterly unconscious of the transformation that has taken place in and around him, the voice that was formerly raised in defence of the new now joins the growing chorus, "The old is the good"; for his new has now become the old.

Against this reaction of zeal, this intoxication of enthusiasm, we must guard ourselves, lest our own spirit of progress become at last a stupid and self-satisfied conservatism. Life means progress, continuous progress and growth. He whose mind and heart are closed

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to further revelations and experiences in the realm of divine truth is spiritually dead. To stand still, though it were at the very gate of heaven, is to invite the soul's destruction. Woe to that disciple who fancies that he has at length reached the end of his course in the search for truth or in the possibilities of service; for he will soon feel the rigor of death settling upon him! And there is no more infallible token of the coming of death than this, that the heart ceases to aspire to new experiences and greets every overture of progress with the words, "The old is the good."

So brief and fragmentary is this group of parables, that the majority of expositors omit it altogether, and two of the evangelists, Matthew and Mark, fail to record the third of the group. To my mind, however, they are no less suggestive and practical than others that have been more often reviewed. And this last is a worthy capstone to the group. To-day as never before its message touches the life of the Christian Church at a vital point. However it may have been in the past, the intelligent Christian worker of the present age must recognize the fact that the great obstacles against which we must strive now-a-days are not gross sins and unqualified evils. The daily choice of the disciple is between the good and the better, between satisfaction with the inheritance from the past and aggressive effort for new conquests. Ours is the rich legacy of nearly twenty Christian centuries. The vintage of all lands and climes in character, in intellect, in religious truth and spiritual experience has been stored up for our use. Truly the old *is* good, and many a soul is content merely to enjoy that which has been given, to rest at ease like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. But the call of the Christ is to ceaseless progress. The watchword of his kingdom is "Forward!" The old may be good, but the new is better. However great the achievements, however rich the experience, however glorious the con-

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quests of the past, the future holds achievements that are greater, experiences that are richer, conquests that are far more glorious. Then let us be thankful that the old is so good; but let us not make of the good a weight to anchor our souls fast to earth; rather let us shape it into wings that shall bear us aloft to new and higher atmospheres and shall fit us for larger and nobler service.

Counting the Cost

CHAPTER XIX

Counting the Cost

THE TOWER BUILDER

Luke 14:28-30

Text.—“*Count the cost.*”—Luke 14:28

JESUS never belittled the difficulties of his service. He never sought to win followers by making the Christian life seem easy, or in any way modifying the absoluteness and perfection of the divine requirements. He never dazzled the minds of his hearers with glowing promises of reward either here or hereafter while concealing the pain and the suffering and the sacrifice by means of which that reward must be obtained. On the contrary, he declares with the utmost clearness, intensified by frequent reiteration, the exacting standards of God's law, and paints in vivid colors the toil and danger and complete self-surrender that are the necessary conditions of success in all spiritual endeavor. At times his language seems to border on exaggeration in consequence of his effort to make the truth perfectly clear. At other times we feel that his utterance is well-nigh cruel and forbidding.

Why is this? Is it because he wishes to repel from his service those who come to him with eager proffers of allegiance? Does he wish to blight the tender shoots of faith and loyalty that are just springing in the soil of the heart? Surely not that! What then? The answer speaks itself. In the first place, he would guard

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against later discouragement and defection on the part of disciples by giving them a clear view of the difficulties and dangers of their service at the very outset—yes, before they have taken the first step in self-commitment to him. Besides this, and even more important, he would by this frank portrayal of self-renunciation and sacrifice call forth the strongest elements of the manly and womanly nature in the spirit of struggle and conquest. It is a challenge to thoughtfulness and to heroism, the supreme qualities of enlightened manhood. If these qualities be enlisted under the banner of the Christ, discipleship is strong and persistent. Without them there must be repeated lapses.

In the course of his ministry great multitudes have gathered about Jesus, drawn by many and diverse motives. Some have come out of mere curiosity to hear his words and see his mighty works. Others have attached themselves to him through gratitude for kind deeds wrought upon themselves or their friends. And others still are moved by a deep but somewhat undefined hope of greater things yet to be revealed. Few if any of them all have any adequate notion of what is involved in true discipleship. Their loyalty is superficial at best, their attachment weak.

Suddenly the Master turns to them, and in a tone at once profoundly serious and eagerly hopeful exclaims, "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." And I fancy that many in that vast multitude, hearing these words, turned away and forsook their high quest, some with sighs of regret, others with words of contempt and ridicule. There were a few, however, perhaps a goodly number, whose minds were sobered by the challenge, whose faces took on a more serious and determined expression

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from that hour, and who listened with intense earnestness to the further unfoldment of his thought. But whether men heard or rejected them, the words abide as the permanent utterance of the Christ to every age. They come to us in this far-off time to startle us with the thrill of an electric shock, to shatter all easy-going or superficial ideals and to stimulate the spirit of inquiry and deepened consecration.

What does Jesus mean? Does he teach us to despise natural affection, and condition his service upon the heartless smothering of filial love? Must the instinctive affections of the heart be sternly and even cruelly repressed in order that we may attain to spiritual life? Does the highest sainthood involve treason to the dearest relations of life, and the utter destruction of the tenderest emotions of which the human heart is capable? God forbid! The entire course of human progress under the light of gospel teaching renders any such interpretation absurd. With the growth of Christliness in the soul human love grows ever deeper, stronger, more tender, more intense. There are those who extol the filial reverence of the Chinese and other unchristian peoples; still the fact remains that paganism discloses no such examples of love between husband and wife, between parent and child, between brother and sister, as is the common experience of Christian society. If, now and again, there is manifested some development of religious zeal in the name of a higher spiritual life that stifles natural affection, it soon proves itself to be a devil-born monstrosity. True Christliness, I repeat, deepens and intensifies the natural affections by the very power of that supreme love to which these are subordinated; yet all their tenderness and beauty are as hate itself when contrasted with the soul's loyalty to its divine Master. If for a moment they conflict with that, they must be laid upon the altar and consumed. It is thus from the ashes of self-immolation that there has sprung a chastened, humble,

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obedient love that is immeasurably stronger and purer than any love can be when wedded to self-will.

A startling utterance truly is this of our Lord, yet one that has been vindicated times without number in the history of all godly living, from the day when misguided Abraham laid his son on the altar at Moriah to the modern era of missionary devotion when a Mary Reed surrenders the love and joy of a beautiful Christian home in order that she may devote her life to the comforting and salvation of lepers in India. True, the actual requirement of such heartrending sacrifice may be rare, but the spirit of it must be universal. The readiness to obey such a call is the token of genuine discipleship, the condition of all highest moral and spiritual attainment.

Only for the shallow and half-hearted who turn back from his service is this challenge of the Master left in its original sharpness and uncertainty. For those who remain to hear more, there are parables which make his meaning clear, his utterance reasonable. These parables are two in number, (1) the parable of The Tower Builder, and (2) the parable of The Warring King. Although brief in form and incomplete in structure, these sketches are as really parables as several others that are much better known. In their interrogative and fragmentary form they resemble the parables of The Lost Sheep and The Lost Coin. Like those, also, they present similarity of outward features with an important distinction of inner meaning. Clearly there are truths common to the two, but they are not therefore identical or repetitious. Both suggest the necessity of intelligent foresight. Both emphasize the difficulties of discipleship. Both appeal to the spirit of struggle, the strong and manly element in human nature. But the one, the parable of The Tower Builder, views discipleship from its selfward side as the attainment of sainthood, the cultivation of a truly Christlike character; while the other, the

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parable of The Warring King, contemplates the Christian life from the view-point of service, of aggressive effort for the building up of God's kingdom in the earth.

At present we are concerned only with the parable of The Tower Builder. "Which of you," says the Master, "desiring to build a tower, doth not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have wherewith to complete it?"

To the most superficial hearer the parable utters its ringing message, "*Count the Cost.*" It is first of all a challenge to thoughtful and intelligent foresight. It is a warning against hasty and unconsidered action. It bespeaks for the spiritual life that same care, that far-sighted wisdom, that personal preparation, that earnestness, which are so essential in the success of any enterprise. It will not do to leave the religious life to the chance of impulse or emotion while we give to secular affairs our profoundest thought and care.

To enter the service of the Christ is indeed an immediate and an imperative duty for all; yet it is a supremely serious matter. In the noble words of the ancient marriage service, "It is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God." No one should undertake such a service without profound and prayerful consideration. This does not imply delay. It does not excuse procrastination. For the most thoughtful and far-sighted business man is sure to be most prompt in action. It does, however, imply honest inquiry, serious attention. It implies the weighing of comparative values, the estimating of possibilities and desires, the forming of permanent and life-controlling purposes. These may be done quickly, but they should be done thoroughly.

More deliberate and thoughtful consecration is one of the crying needs of the modern religious life. We are too superficial. We take too many things for granted.

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We do not bring ourselves face to face with the great problems and demands of the Christian life. We do not take a large and clear view of its possibilities in attainment and service. We satisfy ourselves with little where much is offered. We need to hear as clearly as did that curious multitude the first challenge of this Tower Builder—"Count the cost."

But I have said that he has a more direct and specific message for us, a message distinctively his own. This parable turns our thought more especially to the personal or selfward aim of discipleship. Every disciple is called to *be* as well as to *do*—to be in order that he may do. Attainment is as vital to the Christian life as achievement, and it is first. The great work accomplished by a Peter, a Paul, an Augustine, a Luther, in saving others or in redeeming society has only been commensurate with the work wrought in each by the Holy Spirit. They were called to *be* saints before they were called to make saints; and their mighty influence in the conversion of men was at once the result and the means of their own sanctification.

The first call of God to every man is the call to be a saint, i. e., to the completeness of moral and spiritual victory in his own soul. We cannot drive the world into the kingdom of heaven, but we can lead it there. Too often we forget this. To an eager young reformer. Count Tolstoi once said, "Young man, you sweat too much blood for the world; sweat some for yourself first. . . . If you want to make the world better, you have to be the best you can, . . . you cannot bring the kingdom of God into the world until you bring it into your own heart first." God's word echoes in each of those pregnant sentences. Our Lord was always very emphatic in declaring the necessity of personal attainment first, not for its own sake alone, but as a prelude to work for others.

It is this selfward effort, this struggle for saintliness

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of character, which Jesus represents under the figure of a Tower Builder. Architecture always represents that when used as a type of the spiritual. The mason is the universal man, and the structure that he rears is a fitting symbol of that most noble of all creations, the human character.

"All are architects of fate,
Working in these walls of time,"

sings the poet, and he is but repeating in slightly different form the declaration of the apostle, "Ye are the temple of God."

What more glorious, and at the same time, what more appalling task can you conceive than this—the attainment of a saintly character! To stand face to face with an Abraham, or with a Paul, or with a John, yes, to stand face to face with Jesus himself, and to realize, "This is what I want to be, what I must be"—does it not suggest an almost hopeless task? Here is a rude fisherman, Peter, bigoted, ignorant, fickle, profane. The call sounds in his ears one day as the Master walks by the Sea of Galilee, "Follow me, and become *Saint Peter*, the steadfast, the holy, the loving, the self-sacrificing, the martyr." Could the rude fisherman have seen at the moment of his enlistment some noble saint, the exact counterpart of what he himself was to become, doubtless he would have felt that such attainment was beyond his utmost hope. So does every thoughtful disciple feel as he contemplates the lives that have attained while he is only just beginning his course.

Yes, sainthood or the perfect life is indeed an appalling aim, but not therefore impossible or ridiculous. It is a goal which every earnest soul should seriously consider. Of those who fail to attain, the majority do so, not because they have really been unable to accomplish the task set before them, but because they have

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never seriously undertaken it. They have entered upon the Christian life with little consideration of its profound significance. They have never counted the cost nor caught any worthy vision of that upon which the cost must be reckoned. The goal has been but dimly outlined to their eyes, if indeed it has been seen at all.

Now the wise tower builder seeks first of all to get a very clear and accurate idea of the tower which he must build. He studies with the utmost care every detail of location, form, size, materials, etc. Only after he has determined all these matters can he proceed to estimate the cost of building. No calculation is possible until he has decided whether the tower shall be of wood or of stone, whether it shall be fifty feet or one hundred feet in height, whether it shall be round or square, and many other facts.

So, too, will the wise disciple endeavor to form some adequate notion of the character which he must attain. He will not be satisfied with popular and general ideals of Christian living or with conventional standards of conduct. He will study for himself the very words of Jesus. He will contemplate the perfect life. And he will consider soberly the sufficiency of his resources and the strength of his purpose for such attainment.

I do not wonder that many a soul halts on the threshold of surrender to Christ with the question, "Can I hold out?" I do not wonder that the heart of the thoughtful man well-nigh fails him as he begins to realize the magnitude of the task. To be a saint—that is a great undertaking. To be a true and worthy son of God, to reflect the image and spirit of Christ in human society, in short, to be what a Christian ought to be always and everywhere, is an enterprise that surpasses the unaided strength of man. Well may one pause at the outset and seriously ask himself whether he is sufficient for these things.

But however appalling the task may seem, it is pre-

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cisely the task to which we are called. "Ye therefore shall be perfect," is the unqualified declaration of Jesus, involving at once a promise and a command. And, after all, could we content ourselves with less than perfection? Is not this just the aim and just the task that marks us as true men and women? Is it not essential to our very manhood and womanhood? Clearly it is involved in our nature. It is not an artificial or an extra requirement foisted upon us by religion.

Side by side, therefore, with the question, "Can I hold out?" there should arise in every mind another question, viz., "Can I afford not to try?" Are not the whole meaning and value of my manhood involved in the trying? Ah, we often forget this question!

Having determined the nature of the tower to be built, there arises next in order the question as to its necessity and the resources from which it is to be built. At this point the parable falls short of absolute parallelism. The building of a tower must be in some sense optional with any man. There may be a question on the one hand of the necessity or the desire to build, and on the other of the ability to meet the expense involved. In the matter of Christian character, however, neither of these questions can properly arise. The perfect character is not an optional attainment. It is a vital necessity. Failing to attain this we fail in the fundamental purpose of life. No true man or woman will be satisfied for a moment with any less perfect ideal. The Christian saint is the only complete man, the only perfect woman.

Nor, in the spiritual life, is there any real question of our ability to meet the cost of building. Doubtless many a disciple who starts well in the Christian life quickly becomes discouraged and fails at the last to reach the goal of sainthood. But this comes, not to those who have counted the cost and found it excessive, but to those who have entered upon the Christian life thoughtlessly. Holiness of life and perfection of character are not, as

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the theologians would have us believe, ideals quite beyond the power of human attainment. They simply express the limit of our resources when wisely and faithfully employed. The doctrine of "moral inability" shrivels and vanishes when touched with Paul's manly exclamation, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Holiness is practicable, perfection is possible to the weakest child who takes Christ for his helper. Every man has "sufficient to finish" if he does not waste his spiritual patrimony or neglect to use his resources faithfully.

The injunction to count the cost, does not, therefore, imply any uncertainty as to man's absolute ability to meet all God's requirements in the manner of life or service. It only implies that without careful forethought and an intelligent estimate of the magnitude of our task we may so waste our own power or so fail to lay hold of the divine agencies placed at our disposal that our task shall be incomplete at last. He who in a superficial or thoughtless manner assumes that he has power to achieve perfection will assuredly fall short of it. But he who, in all humility and weakness, counts the cost and enters upon his task relying upon God will no less surely succeed. The most perfect men I have known are not found among the ranks of the so-called "perfectionists." They have not been the professors of holiness, glib-tongued and shallow-minded. They have rather been men who utterly disclaim all personal holiness and even deny the possibility of such attainment.

Moses, hot-headed and self-reliant, makes a signal failure as a champion of oppressed Israel, and is obliged to flee for his life and to hide away in the desert. Is he therefore unequal to so great a task? No. After forty years of discipline and humiliation, when he is so distrustful of self that he hesitates even to obey the recognized call of God, he goes forth to a greatness of achievement unsurpassed in all the ages. Not only does

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he become the emancipator of his race, but he gives laws which have shaped the life of mankind in every subsequent age.

D'Israeli rises in Parliament with all the confidence and superficiality of youth, and his speech is hooted by those present. Defeat and mortification sober his mind and cause him to measure the cost of success more accurately. After this he presses on till he becomes the foremost figure in the House, the leader of the government, the most potent force in determining the policy and directing the activities of the empire.

It is the spirit of carefulness and foresight, of self-distrust and humility, that conquers the greatest difficulties of life and brings perfection within our reach. Failure, imperfection, defeat, these are chiefly the result of neglect and carelessness. The face of your true saint is never the unwrinkled, care-free face of a child, but rather bears the deep furrows of trial, the strong lines of thought and effort—

"As if the man had fixed his face,
In many a solitary place,
Against the wind and open sky."

Such are the only really beautiful faces.

Difficult, indeed, but quite possible, this task which is laid upon us. In this fact lies the meaning of the last part of the parable, "When he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all that behold begin to mock him." How true to life is the picture! Mockery and ridicule are the inevitable penalty of such failure. If we fail because our task is impossible, the laugh is on God. That we fail when it is possible turns the laugh upon ourselves.

The Christian worker of modern times often strives to belittle the difficulties of the Christian life, to qualify the demands of the Master, and to make discipleship ap-

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pear an easy thing. Low standards of attainment are accepted, and all notions of self-sacrifice and consecration are passed over lightly. What is the result? What could it be but that real sainthood should be rare? Artificial crosses are substituted for the real cross of Jesus, the cross of complete self-renunciation. Certain insignificant rules of life are laid down, and these take the place of the perfect character and service.

This lowering of standards and concealing of difficulties were bad enough if it accomplished its purpose; but it is utterly unpardonable when it fails, as it always does. Instead of winning men and filling the ranks of discipleship, it brings the Church of Jesus Christ into contempt with many of the strongest minds. The challenge to manhood and the spirit of struggle are wanting. In the primitive days, when discipleship involved risk of life and certainty of suffering and sacrifice, men, the strongest and best, flocked to the standard of the cross. But to-day, when luxury has displaced sacrifice and ease has usurped the throne of service and consecration, men are in the minority in the Christian ranks. The mass of present-day converts are won from the ranks of youth, and not a few prominent Christian workers consider it a well-nigh hopeless task to labor with those of mature age.

Never were the opportunities for spiritual attainment better than to-day. Yet such attainment now as ever is conditioned upon earnest forethought and complete self-renunciation. The modern crucible may be different in form from the old, but gold and silver are purified by fire in this age as in the most ancient times. No less true is it that amid all the changes of society and life character is wrought out in the twentieth century Christian as in the disciple of apostolic days, only by severe and tireless struggle entered upon in the spirit of intelligent and prayerful consecration.

Courage and Cowardice

CHAPTER XX

Courage and Cowardice

THE WARRING KING

Luke 14:31-33

Text.—“*Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*”—Luke 14:33

THERE are two ways in which we may look at the work of Jesus. On the one hand, we may see in it an infinite sacrifice made *for* us and which leaves nothing to be done *by* us but to receive and enjoy. On the other, we may see it as a model for our imitation, a force for our inspiration, calling upon us to follow in his footsteps and thus to work out our own salvation and perform our part in the salvation of the race. According to the one view, the gospel becomes a sort of spiritual anesthetic, lulling the soul into a selfish and fatal slumber. According to the other, it sounds a clarion note of challenge to our strongest manhood, our most devoted womanhood, the manly response to which is fraught with blessing to the world.

Many there are who delight to sing,

“Jesus paid it all.”

and to so interpret that hymn that it leaves nothing to be done by themselves. Others, rejoicing in what they believe to be a true Christian experience, have sung—

“My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,

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And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss."

But that is not Christianity as Christ taught it. Rather is it what some one has appropriately styled, "*Sanctified selfishness.*"

In contrast with this spirit Jesus himself exhausts the resources of language to make his message a challenge instead of a soporific. Plainness of speech and vividness of parable combine to picture the exceeding greatness of the labor which his service demands. In extravagance of statement he outdoes the pessimist; yet he utters every challenge with an air of confidence that it will be accepted and that the acceptance will be vindicated by success. In his darkest pictures there is the ring, not of hopelessness, but of expectation. He does not believe that his hearers will be terrified or discouraged. He is very sure that deep down in the heart of every man there is a spirit that responds to just such appeals, a heroic element that needs great trial to bring it out and to make it the dominant element of his being.

Is not this one secret of Jesus' power to win men and to save them, that he calls out the divine in man by presenting a divine task for his accomplishment? He develops spiritual courage by taxing that courage to the utmost. He cultivates spiritual power by stimulating the strenuous exercise of that power. It is "deep calling unto deep"—the deep things of God calling unto the deep forces in man; the deep necessities of life calling unto the deep sympathies of the human heart; the deep revelations of duty and of possibility calling unto the deep spirit of consecration and sacrifice in the accomplishment of Christly service.

In the parable of The Tower Builder, we catch a glimpse of the task that lies before every man who would fulfil the Christian ideal of sainthood. Sobered by a vision of the greatness of the completed task, we are

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bidden carefully to count the cost before we begin, that we may not abandon the task in discouragement when it is partially done. And now in the parable of The Warring King, we have a similar treatment of aggressive Christian service. The magnitude of the service required is set over against the limited resources of the servant, with the corresponding alternative of struggle or surrender. The parable is no less profoundly and distinctly significant than the one which immediately precedes it.

"What king," says the great Teacher, "as he goeth to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"

Could the most confirmed pessimist present a more doleful picture of the comparative adaptation of our forces to the task which devolves upon us? Is not that the continual cry of unfaithful souls?—"The work is too great! It is quite beyond our powers! We can never do it!" Think of it. Twenty thousand to conquer and only ten thousand to do it with! The odds are great, almost overwhelming. Yet is it, after all, an exaggeration? Is it not a perfectly truthful picture of the reality which confronts us every day? No intelligent man can thoughtfully estimate the tasks of life and the resources of human wisdom and might without feeling that the apparent force is utterly inadequate to the demand. So much to do and so little with which to do it; that is not exaggeration but sober truth.

Is this picture necessarily disheartening therefore? Not by any means. Rather is it inspiring. The world's greatest victories have been those of the ten thousand over the twenty thousand. Such victories have marked every important step of human progress. Few are the great triumphs of truth and righteousness that have been won in equal battle. Witness some of the principal way-

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marks of liberty. On the plain of Marathon a mere handful of Greeks fought with more than ten times their number of Persians and drove them into the sea. On the historic field of Sempach a few brave Switzers made way for liberty by defeating Austria's strong army. At Lexington the "embattled farmers" fired the shot that seemed at the time to invite destruction, but in the end meant victory over the armies of Great Britain. Many and marvelous have been the triumphs won for God and humanity by the fearless confronting of the twenty thousand by the ten.

Nor is such conflict without its special attraction to the heroic spirit. A Horatius does not wait long for a response to his challenge—

"And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods?"

Though the "odds" were three against thousands, two men sprang to his side in a moment ready to dare and to die if need be in defense of their city. They did not die; but living and triumphant they won immortality.

For such odds heroic souls are ever ready to volunteer when a Lieutenant Home would carry bags of gunpowder in the very face of the enemy to blow up the Cashmere gate at the siege of Delhi, or when a Hobson would lead a desperate enterprise to bottle up the Spanish fleet in the harbor of Santiago. In such emergencies the difficulty is, not to secure a sufficient number of volunteers for the service, but to select the small number required from the many who offer themselves. And, be it observed that the three in alliance with a favoring Providence have again and again obtained complete victory over the host, the ten thousand in defense of highest truth have put the twenty thousand to flight.

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The parable of The Warring King is, as I have said, a parable of aggressive Christian service. It is a picture of the struggle between the forces of righteousness and the powers of evil, between the kingdom of heaven and the realm of darkness. Better still, it is a picture of the task that falls to the individual disciple who takes his part in the redemption of the world. The representation is not general but specific, not collective but individual. Jesus is not representing the task which rests upon the shoulders of the Church or of the apostles alone. To every student of the parable he says, "This is the task that falls to you if you are to be accounted worthy to bear my name."

Look at the world around you, the community in which you live, the circle of acquaintance and influence in which you move. Do not opportunities arise on every hand? Do not evils challenge you without number? Do not tasks great and manifold challenge achievement? Is there not work sufficient for a spiritual Hercules that cries out to be done? But you look at your resources of spiritual power, of wisdom, of experience, and you feel that they are totally inadequate. Your forces are but as ten thousand while the hosts of wrong number twenty thousand. It may be even worse. You are single-handed, perhaps, while it is a vast army that threatens. I do not deny the disparity of forces. That is common enough and you do well to recognize it; yes, to consider it soberly. Were you unconscious of it or blind to its significance there were little hope of victory. Sober forethought is an essential condition of ultimate success, since that alone can make us truly wise in the employment of our resources.

Let us face all the facts intelligently but courageously. To set ten thousand in array against twenty thousand were simply to invite certain defeat, all other conditions being equal. The ten thousand can conquer only when they have some other commensurate advantage which

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shall outweigh the disparity in numbers. Horatius and his two friends held the thousands at bay because they took advantage of a narrow pass where each must be attacked singly. Puny man achieves wonders in conflict with material obstacles by allying himself with the power of steam or by putting himself into partnership with other forces of nature. So must it be in spiritual struggle, in moral conflict. The problem is not simply as to what man unaided can accomplish, but what he can accomplish in alliance with the infinite power of God.

The ungodly man does not realize this. To him all forces are material. Spiritual forces have no place in his calculations. When Moses sends twelve spies into the land of Canaan to search out the wealth of the land and to discover the best mode of entrance and conquest, ten of the number bring back an utterly discouraging report. True, the land is rich and beautiful. It flows with milk and honey. In every particular it is a land to be desired. But the inhabitants are numerous and strong. The cities are walled and very great. Moreover the giant sons of Anak are there. Against such a people what possible hope of conquest was there for the undisciplined and ill-trained host of Israel? Surely any people of ordinary intelligence could see the inequality of conditions, and the folly of such an attempt.

But Joshua and Caleb give different counsel. They urge the people to go forward to the conquest of the land. Why did they do this? Were they more rash than their brethren? Did they not realize the magnitude of the undertaking? Did they fail to take account of the disparity in numbers and equipment? No. They were intelligent and careful men. But they took account of one factor in the problem that the ten had omitted to consider. True, it was ten thousand against twenty thousand, or worse. That they grant; but they add, "*The Lord is with us: fear them not.*" Ah, that is the consciousness that inspires the Joshuas and the Calebs! That

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—that is the factor that more than outweighs greatest odds. That is the reenforcement that shall snatch victory from impending defeat. *The Lord is with us!*

This vision of divine power it was that enabled Martin Luther to undertake a work so far beyond any man as the Great Reformation. When at times the opposing force seemed about to overwhelm him, he and his friend Philip Melancthon would sing together that grand battle-hymn of the Reformation—

“A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper he, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.

* * * * *

“Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God’s own choosing.”

Were Luther and Melancthon themselves any match for the tremendous power of the Church of Rome? Of course they were not. But laying hold of the infinite power of God they faced the appalling odds and triumphed.

So, too, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden led his little army of fifteen thousand men, at which all Europe laughed, against the vastly greater legions of Spain and Austria, and triumphed. Full well he appreciated the odds against which he was fighting; but his confident expectation of victory grew out of his implicit trust in the power of God, and the consciousness that he was engaged in his service. On the eve of every battle the king in person led his army in prayer, and then all joined in the famous battle-hymn which has ever since borne his name—

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"Fear not, O little flock, the foe
Who madly seeks your overthrow;
Dread not his rage and power;
What though your courage sometimes faints?
His seeming triumph o'er God's saints
Lasts but a little hour.

"As true as God's own word is true,
Not earth nor hell with all their crew
Against us shall prevail;
A jest and by-word are they grown;
God is with us, we are his own,
Our victory cannot fail."

Was the Swedish king reckless to undertake so unequal a task? The result proves that he was not. Though his army was small he was in alliance with Omnipotence and failure was impossible.

Almost every page of history offers its illustration for our theme. What matter the odds, if we are working together with God, if we have his power added to our own? Set a stripling David against a giant of Gath and he slays him—for "the battle is the Lord's." Set a John Knox against the rulers of Scotland and England with the pope and bishops at their back, and he will come off conqueror—for "the battle is the Lord's." Set a John Brown against the entrenched hosts of slavery and mammon, and though he die on the scaffold, yet will he triumph and his very scaffold will be transfigured with glory—for "the battle is the Lord's." Set a Toussaint L'Ouverture against the veteran legions of Napoleon, and though he may languish in a French prison, the freedom of Hayti is secure—for "the battle is the Lord's."

Never forget this item in the account. One against a multitude? Ten thousand against twenty thousand? So it may seem to the eyes that have never been enlightened, to the ignorant, the skeptic. Lord, open his

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eyes that he may see, and straightway the mountainside shall swarm with horses and chariots uncounted. One with God is always a majority. That is no empty proverb, no hyperbole. It is literal truth. Can a man unaided lift a block of granite of a ton's weight? No. But with the help of God, in other words, by taking advantage of certain natural laws and forces, a child may lift many tons. There are moral and spiritual weights far beyond our strength, but with the aid of the divine forces at our command we may easily remove them. Make alliance with God. Put yourself into harmony with the great spiritual laws through which he works and there is no spiritual task so great that you need fear to undertake it.

Now for the remainder of the parable. I had almost forgotten that; yet we must not wholly neglect it. Jesus suggests an alternative to this picture of struggle and victory. What is it? "*Or else.*" There is a great deal involved in those two words, "or else." "Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and asketh conditions of peace." For shame! The coward! He does not even wait till his enemy is close at hand and the danger imminent. Before he even knows that he has twenty thousand men, while all his force and purpose are still mere matters of rumor, he sends to him in the most abject fashion and suffers him to dictate terms of surrender.

Very little respect have we for a king who would show himself so weak and cowardly as that. Nevertheless he has only too many representatives in the Christian Church. Are we not all of us continually making concessions to distant and imaginary evil? In politics, in commerce, in society, disciples are continually yielding their principles and making compromises with worldliness and sin, not because they have been forced to do so by defeat after manful struggle, but because while the

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enemy was yet a great way off they have sent offers of submission and tribute.

"What will people say?" is the terrible question that terrifies many a disciple who would like to take a stand for some principle of righteousness. Most of us do not wait till "people" say anything; but long before they begin to talk or have any occasion for speech we send our ambassage in the form of surrender and conformity. "When we are in Rome we must do as the Romans do"; for are not the Romans twenty thousand to our ten thousand? Surely we should not exert any influence by being strict and puritanical, and we should only be laughed at for our pains. Then let us by all means forestall shame and discomfort by prompt concession and humble compliance.

There is no middle ground. The conflict always presents itself according to the parable, and the only alternatives are manly battle or cowardly surrender. Goethe puts it concisely and justly—

"You must either soar or stoop,
Fall or triumph, stand or droop;
You must either serve or govern,
Must be slave or must be sovereign;
Must, in fine, be lock or wedge,
Must be anvil or be sledge."

Is it not a vivid and at the same time a truthful picture which our parable presents to us? On the one hand, the magnitude of the Christian service with its apparent disparity of force and work appealing to all that is noblest and strongest in our manhood; on the other, the one alternative of cowardly surrender and eternal defeat. I say the picture is no less accurate and truthful than vivid. For is not this the choice that life continually offers—a manly acceptance of the challenge to difficult service with resulting nobility of achievement, or a

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weak surrender with spiritual vassalage and dishonor? It is triumph or defeat, noble conquest or slavery, perpetual compromise, galling tribute.

Such is the appeal of the parable to our minds and hearts. Shall we not consider it soberly, thoughtfully, prayerfully, and entering into trustful alliance with the infinite power and love of God, discover in the very greatness of our tasks the pledge of even greater possibilities that lie enfolded within our lives?

The Lost Sheep

CHAPTER XXI

The Lost Sheep

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Matt. 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7

Text.—“*What man of you . . . doth not leave the ninety and nine . . . and go after that which is lost?*”—Luke 15:4

CRITICISM is an exceedingly dangerous weapon. Like an ill-made gun, its recoil is often more to be feared than its discharge. Particularly is this true of harsh or censorious criticism. Its most frequent result is to convict the critic of ignorance or ill will. Yet the world is full of critics, self-appointed, self-sufficient. Volunteers for this service are never wanting; the better the man or the better the cause the more numerous the critics and the more bitter the criticism. For one Christ there are always ten thousand critics.

The critics are not, however, altogether without their use in the world. As a grain of sand or other irritating substance becoming imbedded in the sensitive tissue of the oyster causes the formation of the priceless pearl in self-defense, so the critic, by a false judgment or unjust condemnation, may call forth a noble utterance of truth in refutation of the same. Many a vital truth or principle of action has been but indifferently understood until some attack of the critics has sounded the challenge to which devout scholars have responded with an exposition that has made the truth ever afterwards as clear as the noonday. So have the critics of the Bible

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ever been the unwilling contributors to a larger knowledge and higher appreciation of that richest of all store-houses of divine truth. The spears which they have aimed at the heart of the gospel have become spurs in the sides of its defenders, inciting them to greater exertions in behalf of truth.

It was criticism the most ignorant and unworthy that drew from the lips of Jesus that matchless trio of parables recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. The Master by his gracious words and yet more gracious works had gathered about him a crowd of "publicans and sinners." They were not a pleasing company of men and women. Doubtless they were coarse, low, unpromising. Such fellowship would not commend him to the more respectable and intelligent classes. Naturally enough, therefore, "the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, *This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them!*"

Had this criticism been peculiar or isolated, had it been the utterance of a few men at one specific time, it might have passed without notice. But so far from being that, Jesus recognizes in it the outcropping of a wide-spread and perennial criticism upon all Christly work, a criticism that would be repeated and reechoed in subsequent ages by those who should call themselves his disciples, the Christian scribes and Pharisees. It is the token of a ceaseless antagonism between human and divine ideals. It lays bare a very common misunderstanding of the spirit and purpose of God in relation to man that is the secret of all false religion. It touches the Saviour's mission at a vital point. It betrays the Phariseism, not of that day only but of this day also; yes, of all time.

It is always a scandal to highly respectable and religious people that the Christ associates with sinners. Every manifestation of this Christly spirit, every attempt to do this Christly work, is sure to evoke severe criticism,

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and that not only from the ungodly and indifferent, but also and equally from the most highly religious, from the recognized leaders in the Christian Church. The Christian worker of to-day who pays marked attention to the low and rude and sinful quickly incurs the displeasure of the respectable and the pious—the “unco guid” as Burns has called them. The Salvation Army and kindred organizations ever find in the criticisms of Christians a more serious obstacle to their work than in the rudeness or violence of the ungodly. So slow are we to appreciate the spirit and teaching of Jesus!

It is, therefore, because of the universality and persistence of this criticism, that had only its beginning with the scribes and Pharisees, that Jesus deigns to answer it. And his reply is most complete and thoroughgoing. His argument, unfolded in three parables, perhaps the most beautiful and attractive he ever uttered, is at once clear, cumulative and convincing.

First he sketches briefly and in a few strokes the picture of the shepherd seeking his lost sheep; then its companion piece of the woman searching for her lost coin until it is found; and he concludes with the complete story of the prodigal and the drudge. These parables are not three different pictures of one truth, a mere repetition for the sake of emphasis. Each picture illustrates and enforces a distinct truth or element of the truth; each is a separate link in the perfect chain of argument; and, taken together, they embody the threefold answer which was necessary to refute the unjust criticism and to expose the error which gave it birth.

The first of these parables, commonly known as the parable of “The Lost Sheep,” will furnish ample suggestion for our thought in the present discourse. It is not a complete story, like so many other parables. It is rather a literary fragment, a mere sketch, yet so touching in its appeal and so vivid in its suggestion that it

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has won a recognition from expositors that has often been denied to other and more complete narratives.

The incident described was one familiar to our Lord's immediate hearers from personal observation. It is familiar to us from frequent repetition. The sketch has become a household classic wherever the gospel has been preached. No need, therefore, to explain it. To add anything to it were impossible. It is in itself an exquisite gem of divine truth. I can only take it as the Master has given it to us, and holding it up before you ask you to look at it. "You have seen it manytimes before?" Then look at it once again and seek, not for some new lesson, but for a clearer apprehension and more perfect appreciation of the old lesson, of the only lesson that the parable teaches.

Were I an artist, gifted with the power to put this parable in colors upon the canvas, I would represent it as a twofold picture, after the manner of Raphael's "Transfiguration." Below and in the background would appear a flock of ninety and nine sheep feeding quietly and in safety on the hillside, while the central foreground of this lower scene would present the figure of the shepherd toiling painfully through the wilderness, fording swollen torrents, climbing rugged paths, pressing on through the underbrush and thorns, to find a single lamb that has strayed from the fold and is lost in the wild. Then above all, the crowning scene in the picture, would be the representation of the shepherd returning from his successful quest, bearing the rescued lamb triumphantly on his shoulders, and calling upon his fellow shepherds to share in his joy, with just a glimpse through the rifted sky of heaven's rejoicing over a ransomed soul. And this scene of transcendent gladness should overshadow that of toil and struggle, even as the old master's transfiguration scene eclipses while it illuminates the stricken group at the foot of the mountain.

Clearly the emphasis of the sketch is upon the spirit

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of triumphant rejoicing in which it culminates, which glorifies all the rest and gives it meaning.

In the search there has been severe toil. Not a little risk to life and limb has been incurred. The wilderness is full of perils for the shepherd as well as for the sheep. Why, then, does he undertake the search? Why go to all this trouble for the sake of a single sheep? You answer at once, "To save himself from loss. The sheep is his own, a part of his property. Losing it he would be the poorer. Finding it he is the richer."

True enough; but that is not the whole story. We may put the case much more strongly than that. The whole meaning and purpose of his shepherd life are involved in this search and recovery. It is a concrete and vivid definition of the term, "shepherd." What is a shepherd for? To watch the sheep that are safely feeding in their pasture or reposing in the fold? No. The business of the shepherd is to guard the flock from danger, to keep the flock from straying, to rescue any that have wandered. In our own New England the safe and well-fenced pastures have made shepherding unnecessary hence the figure of the shepherd is unfamiliar to us. A flock that can care for itself needs no shepherd. A shepherd that would remain with the safe ones of the flock while one was astray and exposed to danger would be no shepherd. So I say the picture given us in this parable is the necessary interpretation of the shepherd's office, the apology for his existence as a shepherd.

We do not wonder at the shepherd's joy as he brings back the lost one. It is joy at the recovery of property that he feared was lost. It is joy in the addition to his wealth. It is joy because of calamity averted. But it is more. It is joy in successful effort. It is the joy of triumph over threatened adversity, the joy of victory over difficult circumstance, the joy of purpose fulfilled, the joy of a flock preserved entire.

And now the scene changes. The Judean shepherd

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and his flock gradually disappear from view, and in their place we see the Good Shepherd of the ages. Human souls are his only wealth. He accounts himself the poorer for every one that is lost. Infinitely more precious in his sight are they than ever was his flock to the most faithful and earnest of those hillside watchmen of Palestine. Not his idly to content himself with such as remain quietly within the fold. Not his selfishly to enjoy the society of congenial spirits. Not his to seek his own pleasure and satisfaction in the company of the saved. If they are truly saved they have no need of him, they will not suffer by his absence.

But there are those who do need him. There are those who have strayed from the right way, who have lost their self-respect and the respect of their fellows, who have become helpless and hopeless. Toward them his soul goes out in strong yearnings of love and desire. For them he seeks. With them he pleads. To them he goes, forsaking all others. To win them, restore them, save them, he is ready to toil, to suffer and to die. So long as there are wanderers to be reclaimed, fallen ones to be uplifted, discouraged ones to be strengthened, needy ones to be helped, they receive his first care; and his joy is in their rescue. No effort is too great, no sacrifice is too appalling, if he can at length bring them all back in safety and peace to the heavenly fold. To accomplish this the Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

Here is the truth in a nutshell. Wondrous truth! The most innumerable host of saved souls cannot satisfy the yearnings of divine love so long as a single lost one wanders from the paths of peace and righteousness. All the infinite energies of heaven are concentrated, not upon the rewards and felicities of the good, but upon the recovery of the bad, upon the repentance and restoration of sinners. Men may speculate as coolly as they please about the number of the lost and the probability of their

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being permanently lost, but the Christ, if he misses a single lamb from the flock, harks away to the wilderness "*until he find it.*" Men, religious men, too often give themselves up selfishly to the companionship of those who do not need their help, those who are as clean and cultured, as pious and proper as themselves. The Christ denies himself such fellowship that he may rescue others who are lost and perishing.

A strange thing is it, O scribes and Pharisees, that the Christ should receive sinners, that he should go out of his way to seek the company of the low and the vicious? Why, that is the very purpose for which he came! That is the essence of his mission. The meaning of his Messiahship, the value of his Christhood, is bound up in that. You righteous ones do not need him. You saved ones can spare him. But the sinners—they are the ones whom Christ came all the way from heaven to earth to seek. How it would belittle his character, how it would stultify his mission, to turn aside from his quest and give himself up to the society of the respectable, the pure, the saved!

What unspeakable satisfaction the Almighty must take in contemplating the host of godly souls who delight in his worship, who gather from Sabbath to Sabbath in his house, who move in the select circle of the saints! What joy must thrill angelic hearts at the sight of numberless pure and respectable lives that have never given themselves over to gross sin and uncleanness! So many Christians seem to think. We scribes and Pharisees contribute bountifully to the gladness of heaven in our own estimation. But what says Jesus? "I say unto you, *There shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance.*" Think of it! That one victim of appetite made strong and victorious, that one incarnation of greed made kind and benevolent, that one proud, stubborn soul made humble, that one foul and

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unlovely creature made clean, brings more joy to the heart of the infinite God and his heavenly angels than all the scribes and Pharisees, all the self-complacent church-members, all the refined and highly respectable religionists in the universe.

God made man for perfection—every man. He wants to see his work perfect. So long as souls live in sin they are making God's work a failure. His success, his infinite glory, are bound up in the perfection of his creatures. His greatest joy is found in the return of a soul from sin to righteousness, from misery to blessedness; for every such saved one brings his work nearer to completion.

Am I carrying the thought too far? I take refuge in the saying of an aged preacher to his younger neighbor, "Never be afraid of making God appear too good!" That preacher does not live, no, nor ever has lived, who could paint the love of God in more glowing colors than those which Jesus used in the parable of The Lost Sheep. By comparison with their noblest efforts this is as the sun beside some smoking and murky candle. It is the picture of sublimest truth which no honest disciple can for a moment hesitate to acknowledge as divine.

Why, oh, why, are we so unwilling to grasp this truth with all that is involved in it? The mission of the Christ was to sinners. The desire of God is toward sinners. The great purpose of the gospel is embodied in sinners. To redeem, to rescue, to save, that is the sole aim of Christianity. Our Lord never had it in mind to form a select society of the good. He never meant to gather together the pure and the righteous into a congenial club to be called the Church and to put them upon a plane by themselves far above the poor and the lost and the wretched. Not separation but salvation is the aim of the gospel. This is its one aim, its only aim. The Church was not founded to mark a distinction between men, to separate the good from the bad. It was founded to help in

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making all men good. The separation will take care of itself. When the work of the Church has been completely done there will be no distinction.

On the walls of the divine gallery hangs this wonderful picture of The Shepherd and the Lost Sheep. We delight to study it and to drink in its marvelous beauty. And when one asks, "Who is the Shepherd there represented?" we are wont to reply, "*Jesus himself* is the Good Shepherd of the parable." "The picture," we say, "is a portrait of our Lord drawn by himself." True, unquestionably true. But does that reply answer the question completely and finally? Does it exhaust the meaning and lesson of the parable? Is the sketch simply an argument in self-vindication? I think not.

The mission of the Christ is the mission of the Church; it is the mission of every disciple of the Christ. The meaning of his life is in no wise different from the meaning of every true life. The duty that rested upon his shoulders rests upon ours to-day in equal measure. What he did you and I ought to be doing. What he did you and I are doing if we have fully understood the meaning of discipleship. The parable is not a picture; it is a mirror. In it see the perfect reflection of your own true self.

As you and I walk along the street, we meet many a fallen soul; from the face the traces of the divine image are nearly gone; all sense of that which is good and noble is fast slipping away; and we hurry on to escape the contaminating influence, to seek a more congenial fellowship, or to join the company of the saints in God's house; and how glad we are when we enter the hallowed atmosphere! But in the very moment when we are congratulating ourselves that we are not as other men, nor even as the one besotted wretch whom we have just met, there comes to our ears the echo of that old refrain, "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that re-

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penteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance."

That unlovely one, that rude, profane, repulsive soul, is the very one that needs us. Toward that one the whole love and desire of heaven go out. For him God lives and waits. For him Jesus died. For him the Master would have us pray and labor and sacrifice ourselves that by all means we might bring him back to purity and manhood. What do we here, contentedly watching and counting the lambs that are safely within the fold? Out in the darkness and peril, far away in the wilderness and storm are lost ones who need the Shepherd's help and care. And we, many times, are only too glad to let them remain there if we can but be free from their presence and from all unpleasant contact with them. Such a one dies, and we heave a sigh of relief, thinking the world is the better for his departure. Or such a one moves from our own community or neighborhood to another place far removed from us, and we congratulate ourselves on lessened responsibility and annoyance. Yet the salvation of such a soul is more to God and the angels than all the beauty of ninety and nine respectable lives like yours and mine. We rejoice in the fellowship of the safe and the good, and murmur "Good riddance!" to the bad and the lost. Does the Good Shepherd so? Ah, remember, the good shepherd is the only Christian. You and I are Christians, not according to the measure of our spotless purity, which may be wholly selfish, but according to the degree in which we share the work of Jesus Christ and manifest his spirit.

As an appeal of divine love to the heart of the lost sinner the power of this parable has long been recognized. In all the wide range of literature it has no parallel from this point of view; but its first and most direct message is to Christian disciples, and this is too often overlooked. We cannot emphasize too strongly the eager desire of the Christ for the salvation of the lost; but, doing that,

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we should never forget that the desire of the Christ is the measure and token of Christian duty, of your duty and mine. We have not fully learned the lesson of this parable of The Lost Sheep till there ring in our ears unceasingly those words of our Lord in which he himself gathers up the whole thought of the picture and flings it forth to his hearers, *"There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance."*

The Lost Coin

CHAPTER XXII

The Lost Coin

THE PIECE OF MONEY

Luke 15:8-10

Text.—“*There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*”—Luke 15:10

THE unity of the race is no fiction of philosophy. It is an unavoidable verity. The brotherhood of man is a truth as vital as the fatherhood of God. To ignore the one is to stultify the other. And this brotherhood, this unity, manifests itself in ways that are not always agreeable. There is a certain identity of nature and even of character that many of us would gladly escape, or deny. Outwardly we confess with Paul, “There is no difference: for all have sinned.” Then Galileo-like we mutter under our breath, “But there is a difference, a very great difference between different sinners.” Too often we wholly pervert the words of the apostle, and make them our excuse for seeking out the most respectable and attractive “sinners,” while we utterly neglect the foul and repulsive, so manifesting a spirit of arrant hypocrisy that is none the less harmful because it is in the majority of cases quite unconscious. This spirit confronts the Master in the midst of his work and he exposes and answers it in a parable.

The parable of The Lost Sheep answered the cavil of the critics. It made their murmurs ridiculous by showing that this seeking of the lost was the very pur-

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pose for which the Christ should come. It vindicated the Saviour's mission and put the faultfinders to shame.

But Jesus does not stop there. He cares nothing for mere self-vindication. He never utters a word or performs an act of self-defense that does not spring from some motive looking beyond self or preparing the way for a positive blessing to others. He knows that the criticism of the Pharisees and scribes is the outgrowth, not of one misconception, but of a chain of false notions closely linked together. These respectable and pious critics had failed to understand the mission of the Saviour and the meaning of religion. But that was not their only failure. They had also misunderstood the nature of the sinners whom they condemned. They had missed their true relation to themselves and to God.

The Pharisee always despises the sinner and puts him in a wholly different order of creation from himself, the saint. The old-time distinction of the book of Genesis between the "sons of God" and the children of men obtains to this day. We see in one class of men a close relation to the heavenly Father, and in the other little more than a higher order of the animal creation. God, on the other hand, sees in *every* man a spark of divinity. In his sight the most degraded and unlovely is a child of God.

To the parable of The Lost Sheep, therefore, Jesus adds this second story, the parable of The Lost Coin. In it he turns wholly away from the vindication of himself and his mission and makes a strong plea for the lost ones, the sinners. He does not excuse them nor make light of their wanderings, but he shows that, however lost and sinful, they are still children of God, as divine and as precious in the sight of the Creator as ever their critics were.

Note the displacement of the picturesque shepherd by the impersonal "woman," the exchange of the living

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sheep for the lifeless piece of silver, the reduction of the number from one hundred to ten, that every distracting element may be removed and the attention concentrated upon a single thought. We have here no comparison or contrast between the lost and the saved. It is not one over against ninety and nine, or even one in contrast with nine. It is simply an emphatic declaration of the intrinsic worth of the lost soul and the supreme joy of the angels in its salvation. The story gathers up the emphasis of the three stories and centers it upon one point. Is the sinner lost? Yes; but he is a lost sheep. Is he lost? Yes; but a lost coin. Is he lost? Yes; but a lost son. Before, the focus of the parable was upon the seeker; now it is upon the *sought*.

A change of character is not a change of nature. Sin may *deface* the image of God; it can never *efface* it. The divine spark exists in every soul. Dormant it may be. Concealed deeply beneath an accumulation of earthiness and sensuality it often is. Nevertheless it is not extinguished nor can be. And that spark of divine life is infinitely precious. To bring it to light and to rekindle it into a growing flame will repay all the labor and sacrifice of men or of angels. Yes, it is worth the utmost effort of God himself. On this thought every detail of our parable centers.

How vividly the divine Artist represents the eagerness of the Almighty for the recovery of the sinner by dwelling on the several steps of the woman's search! "Doth she not (a) light a lamp, and (b) sweep the house, and (c) seek diligently until (d) she find it? These successive steps find their perfect parallel in the workings of divine Providence for the redemption of men.

"*Doth she not light a lamp?*" All through the ages has not God's eternal truth flashed down amid human error and pagan darkness? Never has the world been left without at least some faint glimmer of heavenly light. The "candle of the Lord" has been shining from the

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beginning with an inextinguishable flame. The "truth as it is in Jesus," the fact that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," the faithful saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"—this is the light which God employs.

How brightly that light shines to-day! How infinitely more glorious is this lamp of divine truth than the blazing sun at noonday! Surely no soul in this land ever perishes for want of light. If any are lost, it must be in spite of the clearest knowledge of truth. If our lives are dark, it is not because there is no light, but because we shut out the light which is shining with resplendent brightness all about us, because we will not admit it into our lives.

"Doth she not. . . sweep the house?" Revelation is not the only force or means employed for our salvation. After the giving of the light comes the effort to make the light effectual. The pieces of silver had fallen upon the rush-covered floor, and until the rushes or other objects were removed the brightest light could not reveal it to the seeker's eye.

So the truth of God shines clear and bright; but many things intervene to shut the light from the soul. There are besetting sins, personal ambitions, masterful desires, overcrowding cares, or any one of a thousand other earthly matters. Men permit themselves to become surrounded by evil associates and associations, to become the slaves of ungodly habit, to be wholly occupied with things low and unworthy, so that they are insensible to the persuasions of divine truth.

Then God comes in some special providence, causing a disturbance in business, bringing a personal bereavement or failure, turning the life into new channels, setting at naught the plans and purposes of the wayward child. By one method or another these earthly environ-

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ments are upturned and scattered till the light of God shines clear and bright upon the soul. Then old questions take on a new meaning. Old truth comes home with new power. The divine word awakens a response in the heart. The light is flashed back from the repentant, submissive soul, and in that moment the Creator finds and recovers the lost one.

Again. "*Doth she not . . . seek diligently?*" Ah, yes, the recovery of lost souls has not been accomplished without diligent seeking. Think of all the labor and sacrifice that has been undertaken for the redemption of humanity. Trace the blood-marked footsteps of the Saviour by the shores of Galilee, through the streets of Jerusalem, on the slopes of Olivet. Go with him to the Garden of Gethsemane and up Mount Calvary. Think of the long succession of prophets, apostles, martyrs. Add to this all the vast enginery of the Christian Church, all the varied lines of Christian service, everything that has been done in every land and in every age to bring the gospel to men and to bring men to the gospel, all missionary and philanthropic enterprise, all refining and civilizing influences, all truly unselfish effort to uplift mankind.

In all that marvelous story of the Jesuit missions among the savages of North America, in the labors of a Moffat and a Livingstone in the darkness of Africa, in the toil and sufferings of Newell and the Judsons in Burmah, in the consecrated labors of General Booth and his aids in London and other cities of Great Britain and America, in the tireless efforts of Miss Frances Willard and her army of Christian women devoted to the work of rescuing the victims of intemperance—in these and ten thousand similar activities see the incarnation of the divine Saviour eagerly seeking for lost souls. Is the search fruitless? Will it ever be fruitless? No, no, the seeking of God can never be fruitless.

To the three steps already taken is always added the

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fourth, "*Until she find it.*" The quest of the divine Spirit will not cease till the lost is found, the sinner restored. And the eagerness of the seeking is only equalled by the joy of the finding. "When she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Observe how the comparative form of the preceding parable here gives place to a positive and direct statement. There the one was set against the ninety and nine. Here we see only the one piece recovered as the cause of joy. The great fact of the divine joy in the salvation of a sinner is made more vivid by this simplicity of expression. The thought is withdrawn from all external matters and centered upon one truth. Whenever a lost soul is saved, heaven rejoices. The whole force of the celestial world is concentrated upon the seeking; all its joy bursts forth at the finding.

When some poor, besotted wretch is picked up from the gutter and induced to try never so feebly for a sober life; when some fallen woman is rescued from the paths of sin, and, softened and inspired by the sweet influences of sisterly love, starts out in a new life of purity and hope; when some hardened criminal, touched by the power of Christian kindness, makes even the most imperfect effort toward reform; there may be little joy in the Church, for we do not welcome such very cordially into our fellowship; we do not feel that they add much to our strength or reputation or influence; we prefer to hold them at arm's length for a long time; but there is joy in every true and Christly soul, there is a song in every Godlike heart, and the glad song is taken up and rolled back again by the countless host of ransomed ones, and the very angels around the throne catch the refrain and join to swell the anthem of praise and gladness. We are glad when some clean and cultured and

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influential citizen takes his first communion; but when "Ash Barrel Jimmy" or one of his ilk is brought half drunk into a Salvation Army meeting and is sobered and cleaned and saved, the Hallelujah Chorus is sung by the archangels.

Now what is the meaning of all this? Why the lighting of the lamp? Why the sweeping of the house? Why the diligent seeking? Why the persistence to the end? Why the joy at finding? How shall we explain these things? They need no explanation in the story. Every detail is perfectly natural, perfectly clear to the mind of the most childish reader. Each is just what we should expect. The woman had lost *a piece of silver*, one of the precious metals, a considerable part of her little store of wealth. She could ill afford to spare it from her slender hoard. To incur such a loss meant a great deal to her. The possibility of loss arouses deep anxiety; the recovery causes corresponding joy.

When we come to the spiritual interpretation the matter is not so simple. It is difficult for us to realize this phase of the divine character. To think that God really suffers loss when a soul strays from the path of rectitude, that he is really anxious and eager for its recovery—how many of us ever rise to such a conception? We coolly theorize about the probable number of the saved. We calmly discuss whether it be worth while to put forth this or that effort for the salvation of men, and whether certain classes of our fellow creatures are open to spiritual influences. Yes, we even consign the great majority of the race to endless perdition with only a superficial sigh of regret. And all the while God is working, agonizing, sacrificing for their salvation.

We picture the infinitely loving God as a cold and indifferent Judge, thinking much of the dignity of his law, concerned above all else for the majesty of his own will. We represent him as with perfect self-satisfaction punishing and driving into permanent exile those

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who have disobeyed him and wandered from his fold.

Not such is the portrait of the Father that Jesus has sketched for us. He would have us believe, he would have us understand, that *every* soul is precious in the sight of God. Not one can go astray without causing him sorrow and loss. As some one has phrased it, "The lostness of the sinner is God's loss, and God suffers more than the sinner by the separation."

But we have not told the whole story when we say that it is a bit of precious metal that is lost. It is more. It is a coin—*a coin of the realm*. It is not merely a piece of silver of fluctuating value, dependent for its worth upon the state of the market. It is silver minted and molded into money. Its value is fixed by the stamp upon it. It bears the image and superscription of the emperor. It is designed not simply as a medium of exchange, but equally for a testimony to the royalty and right of him whose likeness is impressed upon it.

Is the value of a coin lessened by being lost? Is the dollar in the gutter worth less than the dollar in the pocket? Of course not! True, it may become rusty and dusty; it may be tarnished and to some extent defaced or encrusted with filth; but it is a coin still, as valuable and as standard as when it lay in the purse or adorned the person of its owner. It is not the brightness and beauty of a coin that determines its value, nor yet is it the place where it lies, but the metal of which it is made and the figures stamped upon it.

Here is the key to the parable in a single word. Here is the focus of every detail in the story. The eagerness in seeking, the joy in finding, both point to the unspeakable value of the human soul, to its essential divinity. "A *lost* soul," you say. Yes; but a soul none the less, a soul made in the image of God, just as divine and just as precious as the soul that is not lost. "Scribes and Pharisees," "publicans and sinners," what are they?

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Two different classes of beings wholly distinct and unrelated? Two independent and divergent products of moral evolution? No, they are coins from the same mint, of equal worth, identical in value. The one may be polished and bright, the other soiled with the dust of the floor, but they are stamped with the same likeness, they represent the same measure of wealth in the kingdom of heaven.

Can it be possible?—that repulsive, sin-stained, unlovely creature, of the same order of being with ourselves who are so clean and so attractive? That profane and godless wretch, can he have anything in common with us who delight in the worship of God's house and who are very careful never to transgress God's law? That selfish, sordid person, can he be even remotely akin to us who are so benevolent and kind? So we, the scribes and Pharisees of to-day, often ask. And the Christ of to-day, as of old, replies, "Who made thee to differ from another?"

"Think gently of the erring one!
And let us not forget,
However darkly stained by sin,
He is our brother yet.

Heir of the same inheritance,
Child of the self-same God;
He hath but stumbled in the path
We have in weakness trod."

As the parable of The Lost Sheep emphasizes the truth that the great work of Christ in every age is to save the lost, this parable of The Lost Coin teaches us that the lost and the saved are one in nature and value. The worth of a man is not determined by outward condition or accident. We may admire the mere adornments of the man. We may applaud physical strength, courage,

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or achievement. We may set great store by intellectual acquisition. We may pride ourselves overmuch on refinement, purity, uprightness. We may flatter ourselves because of our piety and religiousness. All these things deserve attention. They are essential elements in our salvation. They are of no little importance to the comfort and welfare of the race. But far above the best of them, of infinitely greater value than all, is the divine fact of manhood. It is an immeasurably greater thing to be a man than to be a philosopher; greater to be a man than to be a reformer; yes, greater to be a man even than to be a Christian. To be made of the precious metal, to be stamped with the image of the King of kings, that is the vital thing. And he who bears that image is never to be despised or despaired of however he may be soiled and battered with the world's rough handling.

The brotherhood of man is a great reality; and we should never let the greatness of it overshadow its reality. It is easy to wax eloquent over our responsibility for the remote nations and tribes of the earth, to stir up emotional sympathy for some oppressed Armenians or starving Hindoos. That is the greatness of this brotherhood. But to recognize our own immediate kinship with the erring and the disagreeable in our own community, that is the reality of it which is not so easy or so acceptable.

The sword of the Spirit as it flashes from this parable is two-edged. It pierces Pharisees on the one hand and sinners on the other. Whoever is unwilling to be reckoned in the one category must take his place in the other or he will miss the message that lies in this story. To Pharisees it speaks a message of brotherliness; to sinners a message of self-respect. To both it proclaims the divine sonship of every man—the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of his children as mutually essential to the interpretation of the gospel. We have missed

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the one great purpose of the story if we have not been drawn away from all distinctions of character and attainment, if we have not discovered that these are, after all, but accidents, and learned that the most precious thing in the universe, the true coin of the kingdom of heaven is *the human soul*.

The Lost Son

CHAPTER XXIII

The Lost Son

THE PRODIGAL AND THE DRUDGE

Luke 15:11-32

Text.—“*This my son . . . was lost, and is found.*”—Luke 15:24

NOT what we do is the measure of life's worth. Not what we fail to do is the measure of its worthlessness. More important than the doing or the not doing is the spirit that controls our life, the motive that inspires our action or causes us to refrain from acting. Godliness does not consist solely or chiefly in upright conduct, in faultless character, in pious manners and religious observances. It consists in love—love to God that manifests itself in love to all his creatures. It consists in love by whatsoever means and in whatsoever forms revealed. Love is the fulfilment of the law; and love is also the very essence of the gospel.

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.”

This is the direct and epigrammatic way in which St. Paul puts the very truth that Jesus embodied in the story

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commonly known as the parable of The Prodigal Son. Jesus would teach us, and Paul would emphasize the truth, that holiness and sin are not primarily contrasted forms of outward conduct. They are contrasted spirits, and whatever grows from these. Holiness is love and such conduct as love inspires. The essence of sin, on the other hand, is not disregard of respectability or neglect of the conventional forms and services of religion, it is not even the infraction of moral law, but *lovelessness*. Loveless respectability, loveless piety, loveless morality are as really sinful and as destructive of character as is the conduct which we brand disgraceful.

Pharisees and scribes had been shocked at the association of Jesus with the lower and less refined classes. They had murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them!" They had flattered themselves that "sinners" belong to a peculiar social class, distinguished by certain habits and occupations and failings. The Master replies to their criticism with three-fold completeness.

First, in the parable of The Lost Sheep, he vindicates himself and his mission. Then, in the parable of The Lost Coin, he asserts the equal worth of all souls in the sight of God. Now, in the parable of The Lost Son, he convicts the critics of being sinners equally with those whom they were so ready to condemn. He shows them that, however great may be the outward difference between themselves and the "sinners," so called, however moral and religious they, the Pharisees, may be, they are wholly wanting in the spirit of love which alone is acceptable to God. If they are pious, it is formal piety. If they are respectable, it is conventional respectability. If they are honest, it is because they know that honesty is the best policy. If they are pure, it is because purity wins popular respect. If they are scrupulous in the fulfilment of religious duties, regular in their attendance at temple services, liberal in paying their tithes, careful in

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the observance of the Sabbath, particular about unnumbered trifles, it is because they deem all these things necessary to the salvation of their souls. They are not actuated in any of these things by a true and hearty love for God or godliness.

While the parable has become from the beauty and simplicity of the story a matchless appeal to sinners in the most literal interpretation of the word, that is not its only purpose, nor even its chief purpose. The principal figure in the picture as presented by Jesus is not the prodigal but the elder brother. Or, to speak more accurately, the two brothers are placed side by side in contrast with the father. It is the lovelessness of sinful men over against the yearning love of God. The great sin of the younger son is not desertion of his father's house, extravagant and perhaps intemperate or immoral living, unworthy and degrading occupations, but scorn of the father's love which was revealed in these. And the elder brother, with all his respectability and drudging faithfulness shows himself to be actuated by the same spirit.

See how the whole parable is framed to present this truth most clearly.

First, we have a sketch of the younger son. We hear his rude demand for a division of the property. We see him leaving his home and taking his journey to a far country. What is there wrong in all this? Nothing in the acts themselves. Abraham, the saint of antiquity, did the same, and we praise him for it. Not the mere demand and departure, but the manner of doing these things and the motive inspiring the acts are what condemn the young man. He is unloving himself and he does not appreciate his father's love. He wants to get as far away as possible from that father. He thinks he can have no real pleasure till he is out of his father's sight and beyond the hearing of his voice.

Nor does he think of returning till he is compelled by

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hunger. He plunges into a selfish, loveless life. He spends his substance in riotous living. Doubtless chums and companions were numerous enough while his money lasted, but friends he had none. Without love himself, he inspires no love in others. So when his money is gone the companions of his better days disappear and he is left to shift for himself.

At length a crisis is reached. Starvation stares him in the face. He has had his fun. He has seen the world. And this is the end of it. As he sits there among the swine, not daring to take even so much as a husk or carob pod to stay the cravings of his hunger, "he comes to himself." Adversity is a wonderful eye-opener. Necessity is the mother of common sense. The insanity plea is as old as sin; but, as Dr. Barker said at the Guiteau trial, "Moral insanity is wickedness."

His insanity cured, not by medicine but by discipline, he sees the real foolishness of his course. But mark, there is no repentance for his sin, no upspringing of love for his injured father, no true regret for his own ingratitude. Those who make this an example of true repentance read something into the story that Jesus never put there. It is simply the desire of a hungry man for something to eat. "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger!" It is a question between return and starvation, and he is not quite ready to starve. "Humble-pie" is better than nothing at all to eat. Men like the prodigal are not the stuff that heroes and martyrs are made of. So he says to himself, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, . . . Make me as one of thy hired servants" (i. e., Let me have bread enough and to spare).

The young man had as yet no appreciation of his father's love. True, he thought up a nice little speech about his unworthiness and sinning against heaven, because he imagined that would be necessary in order to win his

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father's favor; but he was preparing to add another insult to paternal affection by asking for a servant's place in the home of his childhood.

This is not repentance, but reform. It is the return to respectability by one who has discovered that riotous wickedness does not pay. A man cannot procrastinate when he is starving and a vision of plenty arises before him. Most naturally therefore, "He arose, and came to his father."

Now observe the contrast between the selfish indifference of the son and the earnest, longing love of the father. See how eagerly the father waits and watches for his return. "And while he was yet afar off, his father saw him." All through the long weeks and months of the youth's absence that father's heart had been going out to him in love, his eyes had been strained to catch the first sight of his return. At last he comes and the father seeing him at a distance cannot restrain himself a moment. "He ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him again and again." The son is ragged! Never mind. He is filthy and unkempt! What of that? He is the son, the long-lost son, and the father's love and joy are unbounded.

Here, for the first time, the father's love seems to make an impression upon the heart of the son. He begins his carefully prepared speech, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son." And there he stops. He can go no further. He cannot insult such love, he cannot turn his back on such a welcome by asking a servant's place. Never before had he understood the nature of that father's love. Now it overwhelms and conquers him. He is miserable, helpless, destitute. He cannot requite such kindness. The only return that he can make is to receive it in the spirit in which it is bestowed; and this he does.

But the end of love is not yet. The wanderer is wel-

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comed; he must be restored. "Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring forth the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry." See the climax of love. The prodigal is received just as though he had been a loving son absent on duty and winning great honors for the family.

Nor is the picture overdrawn by so much as a single line. That is precisely the manner in which God receives the sinner. First, a welcome; sin is forgiven; transgression is freely pardoned. Then the sinner is restored, cleansed, sanctified. All the joy and freedom and honor of sonship are his.

There is, however, another figure on the canvas that remains to be studied. It is that of the elder son. He has remained at home and conducted himself in a very proper and decorous fashion. None of the neighbors have ever spoken ill of him, for all have looked upon him as a model son. He has been held up as a pattern to many another young man who has showed symptoms of restlessness. But has he gladdened his father's heart? Has he afforded him comfort and sympathy as he grieved over the absence of the younger son? Not at all. If he has ever spoken of the absent one it has always been with a tone of superiority and contempt, and with words of scorn. He has received every tale of wantonness and riot as "just what was to be expected from such a fellow," and every story of want and poverty as the natural and righteous reward of such folly.

As for himself, he is diligent and zealous. He works hard and with a dogged sort of faithfulness. He renders the mechanical, unloving service of a slave. Why did he stay at home? Because he knew that in the long run it would be more profitable than going away. It was also much more respectable. It was wiser in every way. But all the while he felt that his brother was having the best of it so far as real enjoyment was concerned.

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True, the youth was spending his patrimony, but then he was seeing life, he was having a good time, while himself, the thrifty elder brother, was laying up money by losing pleasure.

Read the story once more and see how this spirit reveals itself. "His elder son was in the field." You do not catch him wasting his time looking down the road and watching for the return of the graceless young scamp who had gone off so long ago. There has been loss enough already and worry enough on his account. Better give all his time and energy to repairing the wastes and improving what remains of the property.

Mark the contrast between the attitude of this son and the father. "Now his elder son was in the field"—"While he was yet afar off, his father saw him." The father eager, hopeful, ever watching for the prodigal's return—the brother wholly indifferent and thinking only of work, work, everlasting work.

In the course of his work he happens to approach the house and he hears the sound of merriment and joy and asks what it means. "Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." The servants are infected with the father's joyful spirit. Does the elder son catch the enthusiasm? Does he rush in to greet his brother and welcome him back again? Not by any means. On the contrary, he is angry that all this fuss should be made over the fellow's return. Why, it is simply putting a premium upon profligacy! It is encouraging the young man in his evil course. The boy never was good for anything to work before he went away and he will probably be worth less than ever now. For the elder brother can think of nothing but work. That is his ideal of righteousness and manhood and duty.

Then "his father came out, and entreated him. But he answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years do *I serve thee* (as though he had been a servant all the

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time instead of a son), and *I never transgressed a commandment of thine.*" You see it is all service and obedience; not a word about love or filial kindness or sympathy. "And yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." In other words, "I have slaved and drudged and have had no pleasure. I have sacrificed the true joy of my life to work for you. although I might have been having a good time like this other fellow." "But when this *thy son* (he does not say, my brother), when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living (he thought more of *living* than of *loving*), . . . thou killedst for him the fatted calf."

Do you not see how the real spiritual kinship of the two brothers betrays itself unconsciously even while the elder makes no acknowledgment in words? The stay-at-home brother is not a whit more loving than the prodigal. Nor has he any higher ideal of righteousness. Both the boys knew that to stay at home was the more profitable course financially and morally, and both thought that there was more real happiness in going away. At home was drudgery, self-sacrifice, work. Abroad were life and pleasure. It was only a question as to whether the game was worth the candle. The younger thought it was, the older thought it was not.

The elder son, I say, was just as unloving as the younger. It was no pleasure to him to be with his father. He shows no appreciation of the happy home and the father's affection. He does not realize that his interests and the father's are identical. If the contrast between the prodigal and the father is sharp, that between the drudge and the father is equally sharp.

To the complaining murmur of the son, the father replies, "Son, thou art ever with me (he at least finds joy in having the son at home), and all that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad: for this *thy brother* was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." The very exaggerations of speech

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and the omission of any hint at desertion and unkindness testify to the boundless love of the father and his joy in the return of his son.

Again the picture is true to the life; for while we are often very much concerned lest the sinner shall not be sufficiently conscious of and repentant for his sins, the one desire of the heavenly Father is for the sinner's return and recovery. Not to make men feel that they have sinned, that they are miserable and unworthy creatures, but to win them back from sin and to restore them to the complete joy of home and sonship is the great aim of the gospel.

Possibly some one may feel that I have turned aside from the central thought of the parable in thus dwelling at length upon the picture of the elder brother. I know that he is usually made a secondary figure, yes, that he is often spoken of as an example of right action in the main, and that the prodigal is brought to the fore as the chief personage in the story. I know that for ages the Church of Christ has taken this beautiful and significant parable and has hurled it at *outside* sinners as though it were intended for them alone. But that only proves beyond dispute the continued existence of this elder-brotherly spirit. It only goes to show that we, we who call ourselves Christians, need to study the parable and to apply its teachings more honestly to ourselves. We call it the parable of *The Prodigal Son*. The parable of *The Drudge*, would be nearer the truth. I have called it the parable of *The Lost Son* and I have not specified which son may claim the title.

If the prodigal represents the irreligious sinner, the elder brother represents the religious sinner. It is the unloving spirit of publican and Pharisee alike in contrast with the loving spirit of God and godliness. The true spirit of sonship, says the parable, is not drudging service, however faithful or fruitful, but love and sympathy with the father. The test of sonship is brotherliness.

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"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen."

How many of us there are who think that religion and righteousness consist in doing something! We are entirely satisfied with ourselves because we believe we are doing the things that will please God. We live very proper lives. We *serve* God, being exceedingly careful to perform all the recognized duties and to attend to all the outward acts of religion, although many times we find this service a burdensome cross. And we *do not transgress his commandments*, staining our lives with sin and impurity. We are righteously indignant because some of our neighbors neglect to do these right things; they are irreligious, and, worse than that, they are positively sinful; they defy the laws of respectability and morality. They have left the Father's house and we feel that between us and them there is a great gulf which we are by no means anxious that they should cross again. Certainly we would not have them cross it until they are fully sensible of their wrong-doing and have thoroughly reformed.

All the while God is saying, "It is not deeds nor creeds that I want, but love." Loveless service is no better than open sin. The father was glad when the prodigal returned; why? Was it because he would now work on the old farm? Because he would have two boys to help him with the chores instead of one? No, it was because he loved the boy, and he wanted his love in return. He could rejoice even in the poverty and hunger that the lad had experienced if the spirit of love had by their means been rekindled in his heart.

So, to-day, God desires above everything else that we should love him, that we should enter into such fellowship with the divine love that we should love everything and everybody that God loves. He knows that with the spirit of love in the heart all else that is good will fol-

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low in due order and in good time. He can do without our service, but without our love neither his heart can be satisfied nor our own highest perfection and blessing attained.

Great is respectability. Great are refinement and culture. Great are piety and propriety. Great is benevolent activity. But greater than all these, the greatest thing in earth or in heaven is *love*.

Prayer, Not a Form
but a Force

CHAPTER XXIV

Prayer, Not a Form but a Force

THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

Luke 11: 5-8

Text.—“*Because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth.*”—Luke 11: 8

WHAT is prayer? Is it a mere religious ceremony? A duty to be performed because God has commanded it? A part of an orderly and well arranged ritual that gives dignity to the worship of God? Or is it a sort of magical charm by means of which the favored children of God may obtain gifts of all kinds without effort on their own part or reason on the part of the Giver? Or again, is it the natural expression of human need and desire, a necessary link in the chain that connects the human with the divine, a perfectly rational method of obtaining blessings, whether spiritual or material, from the heavenly Father?

In all religious thought and service prayer holds a recognized place, but its relation to religion and life finds many and diverse interpretations. Even among Christian people ideas of prayer vary widely. We hear from the pulpits of to-day a great variety of views upon the subject, all of which may be included under the three interpretations already suggested. There are Christians to whom prayer is nothing but a religious form, proper and necessary, but artificial and of limited worth. Others look upon prayer as a sort of Aladdin's

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lamp that brings all manner of uncaused and unmerited blessings. Still others see in it the working of a definite spiritual law, the natural expression of desire that works for its own answer.

It goes without saying that the value of prayer in the life of any individual will be largely determined by the view of prayer which he holds. But that is not all. The meaning and value of religion itself are vitally involved in this matter of prayer. Spiritual growth and efficiency hinge upon right views of the subject. False notions of prayer hinder the full enjoyment of power. Hence it is exceedingly important that we should discover and accept the true ideal of prayer if we desire to make real progress in the religious life and to achieve worthy results in the service of the Master.

Is it strange, then, that the subject of prayer should repeatedly come to the front in the teaching of Jesus? It certainly would be strange if he had failed to emphasize by frequent mention a topic so vital to the life of the Church that was to spring from the seeds of truth that he was sowing. We are not, therefore, surprised to find three striking parables devoted to the illustration of this theme, not to speak of the numerous more direct expositions. The parable of The Friend at Midnight is the first of this group of three, and is a general interpretation of the meaning of prayer and its relation to life. Let us note the setting of the parable, for that will help us to determine its precise meaning.

Disciples had come to the Master with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples"; and Jesus in response had given what we know as "The Lord's Prayer." He does not, however, stay with that. He adds our parable, and continues with a concise expression of the law of asking and receiving, after which he concludes with an argument to show the willingness of God to fulfil the highest desires of his children.

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The request of the disciples indicated a false notion regarding prayer. We may not say, perhaps, that they looked upon it solely in the light of a religious ceremony, deriving its significance from the authority of their leader, but we are sure that they placed undue emphasis upon the element of form. What they desired was a form of prayer. "Lord, teach us *how* to pray," is the literal meaning of their request.

What was Jesus' answer? We do not know the precise words he used. We only know that he so impressed his hearers with the supreme importance of the spirit of prayer that they forgot his words, and the two reports of the model prayer differ essentially one from the other in form. More than this, both reports are so lacking in completeness and rhetorical finish that when the Church wished to introduce the Lord's Prayer into her ritual, scholarly ecclesiastics were obliged to take the fragments given us in the Gospels and weave them together, adding to them a fitting conclusion so that the prayer might have sufficient form and dignity for public use.

The aim of Jesus in this entire discourse is not to teach his disciples *how* to pray, but rather to teach them *to* pray. And so successful is he that henceforth in their minds the spirit of prayer is supreme, and the form of prayer takes its natural and subordinate place.

The fragmentary outline of prayer he follows with a word picture of which these are the salient points:

A certain householder is surprised by the unexpected arrival of a friend from a distance late at night, and at a moment when his larder happens to be empty. The laws of Oriental hospitality require that he should offer him refreshment before retiring. To fail in this would be to offer his friend an unpardonable insult. What is to be done? Why, borrow, of course! The circumstances do not admit of doubt or hesitation. So off he goes to the house of a neighbor, wakens him by knock-

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ing and, explaining the situation, asks the loan of three loaves. At first and for some time the neighbor refuses to be disturbed, but the householder will not be put off. With an earnestness that admits of no denial he continues knocking. Every minute the raps become louder and his demands more noisy, until at length from sheer weariness the neighbor rises and gives him all that he asks.

From first to last the picture is perfectly natural. The sense of imperative need growing out of the situation in which he is placed inspires the householder's request, determines its form and justifies its persistence without any premeditation or conscious process of thought on his part. That his effort was successful follows as a matter of course. There was no time for him to supply the need from his own resources by making bread, and there was no opportunity to buy, for no shops were open at midnight. He must therefore ask it as a favor; and the circumstances constitute a claim on neighborly kindness which may reasonably expect a favorable response.

"Lord, teach us to pray," say the disciples. And Jesus replies, in effect, "Why, prayer is not a matter for teaching and learning; it is a spontaneous expression of need or desire, simple, natural, rational. Just look at this householder. He illustrates all the elements of true prayer, yet he had no need of a teacher. He does it by instinct. His need is his only instructor."

For us, too, this householder is the object-lesson regarding prayer. We may find in him a perfect illustration of the spirit and meaning of prayer quite as sufficient for modern life and thought as for the ancient. The consciousness of imperative need which we are ourselves unable to supply will inspire the spirit and determine the form of all prayer. It will also furnish a reasonable warrant for expecting an answer to our prayer. The argument from the general kindness of men to the infinitely greater kindness of God as manifested in

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his providence is logical and affords a rational basis for belief in the power and efficacy of prayer.

Now, as ever, errors regarding prayer tend towards two extremes. On the one hand are those who think chiefly of the form of prayer, and to whom it is pre-eminently a religious exercise having its end in itself. On the other hand are those to whom prayer is a sort of fetish by means of which all the resources of Omnipotence are placed at the disposal of their wishes.

An eccentric preacher has said, "Some Christians are unwilling to pray in public because, as they say, they have not the gift of prayer." But what is "the gift of prayer"? It is beginning with "The Omnipotent and the Omniscient and the Omnipresent," and ending with "the everlasting to everlasting, Amen." Now the only man in Bible times who had the gift of prayer according to this notion of it was Solomon. He made an eloquent prayer at the dedication of the temple. But, after all, Solomon's piety was of a more than doubtful quality. The prayers of the real Bible saints were without form or comeliness. Those godly souls wanted something and they asked for it in the simplest and most direct fashion. The prayers of Jesus were unstudied utterances of strong desire, usually very brief, and always without rhetorical form. Not one of them fulfils the modern ideals; yet we must recognize them as model prayers.

We can never know the true meaning and value of prayer till we break away from this slavery to forms and phrases. We must make the spirit of prayer supreme in our minds. There must be a deep sense of need, an overmastering desire. These must be great enough wholly to overshadow all thought of form. When, like the man in the parable, we feel an imperative need pressing upon us which we are unable to meet from our own resources, we will not trouble ourselves much about

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the exact form of words with which to express that need to Him who can supply it.

But if formalism destroys the value and stultifies the meaning of prayer at one extreme, fetishism is no less fatal at the other extreme. There are those who talk about prayer as though it were a charm which the Almighty has given to certain favored children by means of which they may obtain any gift they desire without effort on their own part or even reasonable necessity. The self-evident failure of many so-called prayers to produce the desired results renders this theory of prayer absurd to the rational mind. Such a notion finds no support in Jesus' teaching about prayer as embodied in our parable. That commends itself to every thoughtful reader by its perfect reasonableness, and leads directly to his statement of the general law of asking and receiving that follows.

In contrast with the excess of formalism on the one hand and the folly of fetishism on the other, Jesus' picture of prayer emphasizes above all things else the thought of naturalness. It is the expression of that instinctive spirit which prompts the child to ask the supply of its needs from the parent or sends any one of us to a friend when we want a favor. It accords with the daily observed laws of nature and of life.

While the householder embodies the spirit of true prayer alike in his earnestness and his persistence, the subsequent explanation of our Lord, as well as the instant judgment of our own intelligence, makes it clear that we are not to see in the neighbor with his unwillingness and grudging kindness a type of God's attitude towards his children. The necessity of prayer and persistence does not arise from any unwillingness on the part of God, but from conditions in our own selves that must be overcome before we can receive what we desire.

The facts that Jesus sets forth in this parable, taken from well-known social relations, find continuous illus-

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tration in the world of nature. For the supply of our daily need we are dependent upon the gifts of the Creator. Not the simplest requirement of life can be met entirely by our own power. True, we can do something towards procuring the supply, but that something is little more than asking, seeking, or knocking. On the part of the heavenly Father there is no grudging or hesitation. Supplies abundant, overflowing, are provided for our every need; yet none of these comes to us without some trifling effort on our part, and for some of them we must strive long and patiently. A man may starve in the midst of plenty if he will not exert himself to sow or reap or gather.

The difference in the material wealth of different men is not due to the partiality of Providence which gives freely to one and withholds from another. It is due rather to the difference in personal energy or persistence or wisdom which different men show in seeking wealth. The man who seeks wealth earnestly, untiringly, finds it. The man who knocks long and loudly at the door of fortune compels its opening. The man who asks great things and brooks no denial, receives them.

Prayer is not therefore an institution peculiar to religion. It is the expression of a law of life universal. It is a factor in the life social or commercial or political which we know by various names; but when we think of it in connection with the life spiritual, when we raise it to its highest and purest form, we call it prayer. In the religious sphere it finds its supreme manifestation. There it rises above the material and the earthly and directly recognizes the fact of dependence upon God, expressing itself in words of supplication or thanksgiving.

And this is by no means the least important result of prayer, that it deepens in our minds and hearts the sense of dependence upon God by calling forth an acknowledgment of that dependence. We may recognize the general

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law of asking and receiving in other forms without ever thinking of God at all. But when our recognition takes the specific form that we call prayer, the very act involves a confession of God and the soul receives a new and higher spiritual impulse.

When we toil for any of the manifold products of labor, it may be tilling the soil for a harvest, or digging into the earth for rich minerals, or traveling the avenues of trade for gain, we are wont to attribute the results, whether large or small, to our own effort. We have earned what we enjoy, so we think. But a careful scientist not many years ago took several of the more common lines of toil, such as agriculture, mining and commerce, and computed the proportionate results of those which are due to human effort on the one hand and on the other what is due to the direct agency of God working through the laws and forces of nature. What was his conclusion? This: even in the most toilsome and least remunerative lines of production only a very small fraction of the result is due to man's labor. That is little more than the asking. The race could not exist for a single day upon the unaided results of its most strenuous effort. More than ninety-five per cent in every case is the free gift of God.

Prayer is not, therefore, I repeat, a distinctively religious act, a custom or institution that sets the spiritual life apart from all other. It is simply the most perfectly spiritual manifestation of a law that runs through all life. Of the three illustrations given by the Master, one is taken from the sphere of domestic or social life, a second from the courts of law, and the third from religious life as seen at the temple. What could indicate more plainly that the notion of prayer is quite in keeping with the common experience of every phase of daily life? What could emphasize more clearly the fact that prayer is the perfectly natural expression of human desire?

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There are some lessons that must be learned anew with every onward step of our progress in thought and life. This is one of them. The Christian disciple and the Christian Church of to-day need to learn the lesson of prayer just as truly as those first disciples needed to learn it. With the progress of the centuries and the increasing prevalence of Christian civilization we are becoming wondrously well satisfied with ourselves. The sense of dependence upon God, the consciousness of imperative need, weigh less heavily upon us than upon those who have lived in less favorable times. We are no longer pressed with overwhelming desires for God's blessing.

With the decline of the sense of need and the eagerness of desire the spirit of prayer wanes. Individual prayer is becoming less common and less importunate. The prayer-meeting languishes. Other forms of service are being substituted for it. We are beginning to look to education and ecclesiastical machinery as the omnipotent forces for completing the redemption of the world. And so the Church of the twentieth century is fast becoming a prayerless Church. With new meaning and more intelligent purpose we need to repeat for ourselves the request of those primitive Christians.—

“O thou through whom we come to God,—
The Life, the Truth, the Way,—
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us now to pray.”

The Power of Persistence

CHAPTER XXV

The Power of Persistence

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW

Luke 18:1-8

Text.—“*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*”—Luke 18:1

SOME Bible doctrines men accept all too readily. Others they are very slow to accept. That is to say, certain truths are welcomed with eagerness, but are taken in a superficial manner by the majority of disciples, and their truth is seriously distorted, while other truths equally vital are crowded out of our life. Here are one or two illustrations in point.

The injunction, “Wait on the Lord,” seems to many minds the quintessence of the gospel, and the whole life is spent in waiting with nothing received and nothing done. The phrase, “Not my will, but thine, be done,” which upon the lips of Jesus expressed profound humility and submission, has been so misused as to utterly vitiate the meaning and purpose of prayer. Humility readily shades into distrust and resignation into indifference. We smile at the story of the little boy who, at the end of an unusually naughty day, was advised to ask God to make him a better boy and prayed thus, “O Lord, please make me a good boy,” then, after an impressive pause, “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done”; yet his prayer was very like many that we hear from the lips of children of older growth.

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On the other hand, the duty of persistence and perseverance, especially when applied to prayer, meets with increasing objection in the minds of Christian people. We are easily persuaded that it savors of dictation or presumption. This is particularly true of the most intelligent Christians of the present day. The primitive Church did not hesitate to pray earnestly and persistently for desired blessings. Witness the daily gatherings with prayer for the Holy Spirit that preceded the marvelous display at Pentecost, and the similar gatherings to pray for the deliverance of imprisoned Peter that continued until he knocked at the door a free man.

One must search long and diligently to find the parallel of these gatherings now-a-days. Occasionally we hear of protracted meetings, but they are confined for the most part to extremists or to the less cultured portions of the Church. Among the most intelligent and rational disciples individual prayer is brief and well pruned, and as for the prayer-meeting, that has its fixed hours and begins and ends very promptly by the clock, often having a carefully prepared program that gives more time to song and speech than to prayer. Woe be-tide the leader who permits a meeting to run over time that the tide of prayer may sweep on unhindered! He will quickly hear remarks about "religious dissipation," and if he does not heed these another leader will soon take his place.

Now Jesus plainly had no fear of appearing presumptuous. With an agony of earnestness he thrice repeated the same prayer, and that for release from the great trial of his life. Even though he used the phrase "Not my will, but thine, be done," he persisted in the prayer till he received an answer; for "there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." And what he illustrates in that prayer he enjoins in his teaching as do the sacred writers in many parts of Scripture. What is the meaning of that striking scene in the life his-

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tory of Jacob, where he wrestles all night with the angel, and as the morning dawns cries out, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me?" Does it not say in clearest tones, "Hold on to the Lord until the blessing comes?" No other interpretation of the incident can be entertained for a moment by any intelligent reader.

Do we not get a hint of the same suggestion in the parable of The Friend at Midnight? True, it is not the central lesson of that story, but it is surely incidental. As we see the householder repulsed in his first appeal yet continuing to knock and to plead, as we hear his knocks increasing in violence with every minute of delay until he fairly thunders at the door and threatens to arouse the whole neighborhood, and so brings down the surly neighbor, the lesson of persistence and importunity forces itself upon us.

Yet again, the apostle sums up the whole matter in three words: "Pray without ceasing," a motto that might well be written over the door of many a modern church, from which the spirit and practise of prayer have long since departed.

The parable of The Widow and the Unjust Judge is another word upon the same subject. It has no other thought than this—*persistence*. St. Luke explicitly declares its purpose by way of introduction. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, *that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*" Upon this thought every detail of the parable reflects its light. It is not a picture of our relations with God. The figures in the parable are not representative of God on the one hand and man on the other. Rather does the whole scene stand out in vivid contrast with the relations between the heavenly Father and his child. But in this very contrast we find a striking presentation of one element of true prayer. The one lesson of the parable is persistence,—the need and power of persistence.

Purposely the judge, indifferent and unjust, is placed

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over against the just and provident God. It is selfishness in contrast with love, unrighteousness in contrast with holiness, unwillingness in contrast with eagerness. Yet persistence prevails. Notwithstanding the odds against her, the widow persists in her pleading until at length from sheer weariness on the part of the judge her prayer is granted. The inference is plain; yes, unavoidable. If, with all the odds against her, with the sympathy and perhaps the interests of the judge elsewhere engaged and no scruples in action, persistence wins her point, how much more certainly will one win his desire who comes to a just and loving God! If persistence wins in conflict with selfishness, tyranny and caprice, how much more certain is it to succeed when it is in perfect harmony with the unvarying law of a kind and beneficent Providence!

The Power of Persistent Prayer is therefore the theme which our parable presents for our consideration. And the story teaches us first:

That it is right to persist in prayer. The writer's prefatory explanation of the purpose of the parable makes this inference unavoidable. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." This truth calls for emphasis to-day as never before. We are too ready to limit the duty and belittle the value of prayer. We are terribly afraid that we shall appear presumptuous. We greatly exaggerate or misinterpret the duty of resignation. When we have asked once for a blessing, and that in a very cool and impassive fashion, we consider our duty done, and with an unbelieving sigh we resign the whole matter to the divine will.

It is not strange if faith in prayer diminishes as the fear of persistence increases; for the value of prayer and the right of persistence in prayer rest upon the same evidence. Every witness to the power of prayer in human life is also a witness to the efficacy of persistence.

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Not a saint in all the calendar of those who have proven the worth of prayer but also illustrates our theme of persistent prayer.

See Abraham pleading for Sodom over and over again till he obtains assurance that the presence of ten righteous persons shall save the city from destruction. See David praying with fasting and tears for the life of his child until the child's death makes it clear that his prayer is not to prevail. See the apostle Paul entreating the Lord thrice for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh," and ceasing to pray only when he receives a definite answer from God with the promise of grace sufficient for his burden.

Jesus himself was not afraid of seeming presumptuous. As he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, we are told first that he prayed with such earnestness that he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. Not only so, but failing to receive an assurance of the desired answer, he repeated his prayer again and again. All three times he used the same words. No fear of repetition had he. Why? Because he asked for just what he wanted in the simplest manner possible, and there was no call for a change. Not elegant wording but plain expression of intense desire was his thought. How many of us would venture to repeat a prayer for any blessing thrice in precisely the same words? So seldom does desire for blessing overshadow our anxiety about forms.

Who can say how many times Jesus spent the entire night in prayer? Not once nor twice, but repeatedly in the Gospels we are told that he separated himself from all companionship and prayed all the night long. There is persistence exemplified again and again. And its effect appears in the wonderful days of teaching or miracle that followed these nights of prayer.

Yes, it is right, it is Christian, to persist in prayer. The Word of God gives us repeated warrant for persist-

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ence. From the days of Abraham to the present, God's blessings have come to those who have "held the fleet angel fast" until the request was granted. And this lesson confronts us at the very threshold as we study the parable before us.

Again, our parable implies that *it is necessary to persist in prayer*. Why necessary? Because God is unwilling to grant our desires? No, never! God is always more willing to give us the things that minister to our highest welfare than we are to ask for them. The necessity is in ourselves. We are wanting in the spirit of true prayer. We are not thoroughly in earnest. We are actuated by false motives and superficial purposes. We cherish wrong desires. Our spiritual life and experience are imperfect. And often the condition of persistent prayer is the only method of correcting these errors in us. By this means our purpose is deepened, our vision clarified, and we are fitted to make worthy use of the blessing when it comes to us. By this means, too, we are sometimes led to see that our wishes are mistaken and the blessing sought, a curse.

Not seldom the fault is with our faith. Now do not make the mistake of picturing God as delaying his answers to prayer simply to try our faith. That were a spirit unworthy the divine character. Many times have we seen some person old enough to know better holding out a tempting gift to a little child, it may be a pretty toy or some sweetmeat or fruit, and carefully keeping it just beyond the reach of the little fingers eagerly stretched out to take it, for the poor pleasure of teasing the helpless infant. Is there anything Godlike in such an action? Far from it. The spirit of teasing is simply devilish. Let us then be very careful that we do not represent God as treating his children in a similar manner. Yet that is really what is meant by the common expression, "He waits to try our faith." No, no; God does not withhold blessings to try our faith. No need of that. But he often

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delays his answers for the purpose of *developing* our faith, or to remove some obstacle to the fullest granting of our desires.

Persistence in prayer intensifies desire for the blessing sought. Very often we pray for blessings when our desire is but slight. Were the blessings bestowed at once we should value them lightly and perhaps we should use them unwisely. But as their bestowal is delayed our desire grows more intense. As day after day passes we learn to appreciate more fully the value of that which we seek, until at length when it comes we are fitted to use it to the very best possible advantage.

Before he parted from his disciples, Jesus gave them the promise of power from on high, and bade them tarry in Jerusalem until they should receive it. Yet, after his ascension, they met in an upper chamber and prayed for the fulfilment of the promise and no power came. Again they met and prayed, and still no power. Thus for ten days. Do you suppose that those prayer-meetings remained on the same level throughout the ten days, that there was no change, no progress during that time? That were absurd, unthinkable. No, you can easily follow the growth of the spirit and utterance of prayer in each meeting. Day by day their eagerness grew more intense. Day by day their prayers were more urgent. Doubtless, too, there were deep questionings, self-examinations, fresh consecrations and more complete surrenders, until, when on the tenth day the gift was poured out upon them in an overwhelming tide, they were prepared to make use of it for the salvation of thousands.

The supreme obstacle to spiritual blessing is our indifference. Wishes we have and half-hearted desires, but we are seldom moved by an intense yearning. We know little of that sort of prayer that wearies the body and exhausts the vital power. Such intensity of desire as wrings the bloody sweat from the brow or leaves its

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impress in a halting limb, or forgets hunger for many days and nights, is an unknown factor in the religious life of to-day. Our prayers are brief and formal. We are more concerned about propriety of form than about definiteness of object. For this reason persistence is often necessary to overcome our indifference and to kindle in us worthy desires for God's blessing.

Once more, our parable is a promise that *persistent prayer will prevail*. Purposely the judge is put in sharp contrast with God. He is drawn with a most ungodly character. He is pictured as wholly selfish and sordid, as utterly lacking in principle, as thoroughly hard-hearted. Yet he yields to the persistency of the widow. He is conquered by it.

What is the inevitable argument? First, it is from the unwillingness of the judge in contrast to the willingness of God. If persistence can prevail over selfish unwillingness, how much more certainly will it prevail with One who is more than willing to bestow the best gifts! Such characters as that of the judge are common enough in any age and land, and the conquering power of persistence does not lack for illustration at any time. Equally evident is the continuous kindness of divine Providence ministering to the daily needs of God's children, and holding in store gifts infinitely greater than those already enjoyed. Along the line of simple benevolence the argument of the parable is unanswerable; and for many that is sufficient.

There is, however, another point from which we may view it. We have here a contrast between the mere caprice of a tyrant and the absolute trustworthiness of a divine Ruler who always works according to a fixed and beneficent law. That persistence will prevail even over selfish and unscrupulous caprice is a fact commonly observed, but not an invariable rule. On the other hand, the reward of persistence under the reign of divine law is absolutely certain. The stone-cutter strikes a huge block

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of granite with his hammer, and there is no perceptible result. But he strikes it again, blow upon blow, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty times. All the while the block of stone seems unaffected, but in time, it may be at the fiftieth blow, the block falls in two. In that case there has been no increase in either force or speed of the blows; just a steady, tireless repetition. And persistence wins. The workman is sure of the result. He does not know precisely how many blows will be required. He does not count. He only strikes and keeps on striking till the great block falls apart.

When human prayer and desire and effort are in harmony with divine law there can be no question as to the ultimate result. To reach the result may take a long time, may demand much labor and sacrifice, may tax the faith and patience of the seeker. But failure is impossible to him who persists. The ringing declaration of a great general, "I will fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," was a sure prophecy of triumph before the summer was gone. And many and wonderful have been the triumphs secured by persistent and earnest prayer.

Want of persistence in prayer indicates want of faith. True, we often satisfy ourselves with the notion that it is humility and submission to God's will that causes us to cease from praying. But why should humility cause us to cease so long as we receive no answer nor any indication of God's will? Jesus prayed again and again. Paul prayed repeatedly. Why should not we do the same? We have reason to expect some clear and satisfactory answer to every prayer we offer. Unanswered prayer is meaningless. Yet is not much of our prayer unanswered? Is it not true that we often pray without expecting any answer?

Now-a-days there is a great deal of unbelief in the real power of prayer. We have come to think of prayer as a mere religious ceremony to be performed because it is commanded. That prayer has a certain value, chiefly

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due to its reflex influence upon him who prays, we are ready enough to believe. But many of us are skeptical as to its direct efficacy. We have been accustomed to think of the reign of law as nullifying the power of prayer, whereas we should see in prayer one phase of the working of divine law.

One reason only should cause us to hesitate regarding any prayer that we offer, and that is a doubt as to whether what we ask is in accordance with the divine will. Now there are some things which do not admit of this doubt. When we pray for our own spiritual growth or sanctification, or for a revival of God's work in the world, we know that these things are in accordance with the will of God. We cannot therefore be too persistent or too earnest in praying for these.

If there is delay in receiving an answer to such prayers the fault must be ours. We must be wrong at some point. Either we are not sufficiently in earnest or we are not prepared for our part in the blessing. What remains? To cease praying? No. We should continue to pray till we are right, and when we are right the blessing will surely come.

Exaltation Through Humility

CHAPTER XXVI

Exaltation Through Humility

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18:9-14

Text.—“*Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*”—Luke 18:14

THE way up is down.” To reach the greatest heights we must first plunge into the lowest depths. This is often true in a bad sense. Men mount to the pinnacles of worldly success by first descending to the depths of meanness or dishonesty. They attain the heights of fame or wealth or glory only when honor and truth and righteousness have been sunk wholly out of sight or trampled under foot. They grovel in the dirt as the condition of being lifted to a throne.

But it is equally true in a good sense. Before we can ascend the mountain tops of heavenly glory we must go down into the valley of humiliation. Before we can enjoy the blessed fellowship of the risen Christ, we must lie prostrate at the foot of Calvary’s cross. Was it not Wesley who sang,

“Sink me to perfection’s heights”?

Whoever said it, had certainly discovered one essential condition of all highest attainment. Exaltation comes only as the reward of humility.

This is the essential truth illustrated by the story of

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The Pharisee and the Publican. It is not primarily a parable of prayer, as is that which immediately precedes it. The prayer is really incidental; but as an incident it is at once so prominent and suggestive that many readers wholly lose sight of the deeper and broader theme of the story. The evangelist carefully explains that the parable is spoken to "certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought." And the parable applies itself broadly in the words, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The truth contained in these words is susceptible of the widest application in life. It might have been illustrated by a picture taken from almost any one of the numberless phases of human life and action, but our Lord chooses for its expression and enforcement an incident of prayer. He sees two men of widely different character and spirit engaging in a familiar act of worship at the temple. He notes the air with which they come to the sacred place. He observes their attitude and hears their words as they pray. And he goes forth with them to mark the results of their service. Among all the parables of the New Testament there is none simpler, none more direct and universal in its application than this, and few, if any, have been more popular.

In the parable we note three contrasts which serve to bring out its meaning and to impress its lesson. They are:—

- a. Contrasted men,
- b. Contrasted prayers, and
- c. Contrasted results.

First we are struck by the vivid contrast between the men who come to the temple to pray. Before us stand two men of antipodal characters. "The one a Pharisee, and the other a publican," i. e., the one a good man and

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the other a bad man. Let us study these figures for a moment.

Here is the Pharisee—the good man. Do not look surprised. Do not rise up and declare that he was not a good man. Listen to his own statement. “I am not unjust, or an extortioner, or an adulterer. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get.”

“Oh, the hypocrite!” you say. No, no. Jesus does not say that he was a hypocrite. He does not hint at such a thing. We are left to believe that the man spoke the truth, and, without any evidence to the contrary, we are bound to believe him. More than that, if we consider the matter a little more carefully we shall see that the significance of the story is enhanced when we take the man at his word, and realize that he was really a most respectable and religious person. Yes, let us take his story as he tells it, and as Jesus has given it to us.

And what a record that was! He was a just man; he was kind; he was pure; he was temperate and benevolent—a good business man, a good neighbor, a good citizen, a good churchman. How many members of the Christian Church in this twentieth century could give as good an account of themselves and give it honestly? When such a one comes into any community he is welcomed with open arms, is accounted a model Christian, is invited to join the church, and we are ready to overlook a good degree of self-satisfaction in his case.

He is here, close to us; for when we saw him coming we moved along and made room for him in our pew. He was just the person we wanted to sit beside us. He is evidently very respectable company.

Over there is the bad man—the publican. Bad, I say, for he himself confesses it. His business was bad. Nobody but a traitor to his country would accept the office of publican. He was about as disreputable as the rum-seller of to-day. His business was probably conducted badly. Having thrown overboard his self-respect when

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he took up the business, dishonesty, greed, oppression, and kindred sins would quickly find a place in his life and conduct. A traitor alike to his country and his religion, he would not be a desirable neighbor or a useful member of society. His description of himself is brief and is striking as it is brief. "Me, the sinner." No need of going into details. That tells the whole sad story. The Pharisee told the truth about himself; the publican did the same. The contrast is instructive.

Turn now to the second contrast, equally striking, equally suggestive. It is the contrast between two prayers. The good man makes a very bad prayer, so bad a prayer in fact that we can scarcely call it a prayer at all. Better is the definition of the poet:—

"Two went to pray? O, rather say,
One went to brag, the other to pray."

That is the precise truth. The Pharisee did not pray—he boasted; he proclaimed his own goodness.

To pray—what is it? To want something and to ask for it. The Pharisee was not conscious of any want, and he did not ask for anything. He has all that he wishes and is satisfied. His words are an inventory of wealth rather than a catalogue of wants. Oh, but he is giving thanks; and is not thanksgiving a form of true prayer? Certainly, all true prayer involves the spirit of thanksgiving; but there is no real thanksgiving here. To be sure, our Pharisee says, "God, I thank thee"; but does he really thank God for anything? Not at all. He doesn't mention anything that God has given him or has done for him. He speaks about what "I am" and what "I have done." "I am good." "I fast and give tithes." Why should he thank God for that? Himself deserves the credit and the thanks, so far as appears from his own statement. He does not mention the agency of God in producing

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these excellent results. There is not the remotest hint of real gratitude in his utterance.

Then, too, he is more occupied with others than with himself. First, he includes all other men in the general accusation of sinfulness. Then his eye lights on the publican standing at a distance, and he comments upon his special wickedness. Now a man never comes near to God when his mind is wandering hither and thither in censorious criticism of his fellow men. In prayer we look up in aspiration or we look down in humility; we never look around in criticism or curiosity. It is a poor prayer that exalts self even under pretense of gratitude, and that is not winged with some deep consciousness of need and desire, a poor prayer that takes cognizance of others unless it be to bear them up in its loving outreach of sympathy and intercession.

Now listen to the prayer of the bad man. It is an exceedingly good prayer. "God be merciful to me, the sinner" (for that is the literal rendering). There is humility. "He stands afar off," "Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven," "Smote upon his breast." Then he wants something, and is very earnest about it. So earnest is he in his quest and so absorbed in his approach to God that he is wholly unconscious of any other presence in the temple. He does not even perceive the Pharisee standing near the altar. He speaks as though he were the only sinner in the whole world. "God be merciful to me, *the sinner*."

That is a model prayer. It is earnest desire, simply and directly expressed. There is no mistaking this man's sincerity, no doubting his earnestness. Clearly he is moved by a deep sense of need. He has come to the temple with a heavy burden of unforgiven sin resting upon his soul. He wishes to be rid of it, and he asks for freedom. A model prayer, I say.

Yes, we all of us recognize it as such, but we rarely imitate it. It is very difficult for us, however conscious

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of sin, to keep our eyes off that Pharisee—either the Pharisee of the parable or that other flesh and blood Pharisee whom we know more intimately. We may realize that we are sinners, but we can readily point out plenty of self-satisfied hypocrites who, we feel sure, are not so much better than we are, as they themselves fancy. We may not always lift our eyes to heaven, but we generally lift them high enough to look at our neighbors.

Now we have not caught the publican's spirit of prayer till we have not only become conscious of our own sinfulness but have become so profoundly sensible of it that we wholly forget to compare ourselves with others; yes, that we become utterly unconscious of the Pharisees and hypocrites in our neighborhood.

True worship isolates self before God in its closest communion. Each true penitent becomes for the time at least "the sinner," alone unexcused, supremely guilty. No absurdity of exaggerated self-accusation is there; no overstrained or morbid abasement that lowers the child of God to the level of brute or worm. Just a simple, straightforward confession of the truth—the going apart of the soul in the presence of God to be seen in its true light, and seeking no advantage or excuse from comparison with others.

Now observe the third contrast in the picture, the contrast of results. "This man," says our Lord of the publican, "went down to his house justified rather than the other." "Justified," what does that mean? Are we to understand that Jesus declares the publican a better man than the Pharisee? No; for, as we have seen, he was a worse man. It is not the counterbalancing of bad morals and a sinful life by a single religious act that is pleasing to God. Justification and condemnation are not so much declarations of God as they are actual experiences of man. In the case before us at least the

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term refers chiefly to the state of mind in which the two men went forth from their temple worship.

The Pharisee has come to the temple with no specific purpose beyond the fulfilment of a certain religious custom or duty. It is the hour of prayer, therefore he goes through the form of prayer even though he feels no need of it. He does it because all respectable people do it, and he believes that for some reason it is pleasing to God. He wants nothing, at least he is not conscious of any want; he asks for nothing, and he receives nothing. Yet we can be morally certain that as he goes on his homeward way a feeling of disappointment and self-disgust fills his heart.

There is a strange inconsistency in most natures that leads them vaguely to expect some blessing in worship even when they do not ask for it and do not feel any definite need. There is a certain looking for the unsought and the unexpected in the realm of religion, and a sense of perpetual disappointment when nothing comes. Furthermore, as overindulgence in sweets cloy the stomach and produces a feeling of discomfort and nausea, so the contemplation of one's own virtues and the enumeration of one's excellent qualities is sure to result in that mental revulsion which we know as self-condemnation. Who can doubt that this was the state of mind in which the Pharisee returned to his house after his temple boasting? He may have been pure in life and honest in dealings, scrupulous in tithing and faithful in worship, but I'll warrant he was surly to his wife and cross to the children that day. His superior morality and careful piety did not bring a smile to his face and music to his voice.

Do not we also often share his experience? We come to the house of God for worship, but often we come with little or no purpose beyond going through the prescribed and conventional forms. We sing and we pray and we enter into the service, not because we expect

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any definite results, nor yet because we have any clearly defined sense of personal need, but simply because others are doing these things, or because we have formed the habit of doing them and consider the habit eminently proper and respectable. Nevertheless when we go away to our homes at the close of the service we are in a very critical and faultfinding mood. We are disappointed. The sermon was poor, the singing was worse, and as for the prayers and all the rest there was nothing helpful in any part of it. We lament the degeneracy of modern preaching, the decadence of spiritual worship, the poverty of the Church services of our time. True, we had no purpose in coming to the sanctuary, no sense of need. We did not want anything in particular, yet in a sort of indefinite way we expected to be blessed, and we were not. What is the matter? It is the sense of self-condemnation. We have been contemplating our own goodness, if not directly and boastfully at least in a roundabout manner, by way of the failing of others, or we have been indulging our appetite for merely formal worship, till our souls have become somewhat sickened.

Of course you say that the Pharisee could not reasonably expect any blessing from his worship when he was not conscious of any need, and did not ask for anything. But I appeal to your own experience whether the same sense of disappointment and condemnation has not come to you many times from the same cause. Have you not often come to God's house to worship without any definite purpose and gone away disappointed because God did not bestow some blessing unexpected and unasked? If not, I venture the assertion that your experience is unique.

The publican goes to his house justified, i. e., with a great load lifted from his mind and heart. Not that he is now a better man than the Pharisee. Probably it was many years before he rose to such a level of moral-

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ity and refinement and piety as the Pharisee had lived upon from birth. The habits of mind and action that have been forming for years are not changed in a moment. This publican had been hard, grasping, dishonest, rude, and much time would be required to overcome these evil tendencies. But he has made a frank and full confession. He has appealed to God for mercy and help, and there steals into his soul the sense of peace and pardon which is the first condition of a new life. He feels better already because he has determined to do better.

I should like to follow him to his home, to note the tender way in which he speaks to the wife and the gentle manner with the little ones. Even before he tells them of his new resolves and higher purposes they are aware of the change that has come over him. His entrance is like the coming of the sunlight into the house, and the entire family feels the contagion of his new-found joy.

The Pharisee had exalted himself in his boasting prayer over his fellows, and he goes forth humbled, down-cast in mind, vexed in spirit. More than this, it is a step in the downward movement of his whole life. Perhaps the change was too slight to attract attention, but it was the beginning of, or a progressive step in, a revolution in him that would some time bring him to a plane lower than that of the despised publican. Self-satisfaction always marks the beginning of moral and spiritual decline. And that temple service was the planting of a seed whose growth would surely choke out every one of the noble qualities and actions recounted with so much complacency, unless itself were uprooted by repentance and self-abasement.

The publican, on the other hand, humbled himself by a confession and a plea that must have been doubly significant when offered within ear-shot of the Pharisee's

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insults. But he is too much in earnest even to hear those, let alone paying any attention to them. And he goes forth exalted—exalted in mind, and with the first potent impulse towards an exaltation of life which shall bring him daily nearer to God and heaven.

A similar prayer has been the turning-point in many a life. Uttered by the despairing soul in the depths of misery and degradation it has furnished the power and the courage to rise once more to the level of purity and hope. Uttered by a soul seeking to escape from the fetters of pride and false respectability, it has melted the frozen heart and has transformed the icy crystals of a dead religion into refreshing fountains of spiritual life and power.

I have said that while prayer is the particular subject of this picture, its lesson is not designed to apply solely to prayer. In fact, it is not restricted to any part of the religious life, but stands as a type of spiritual life as a whole. The truth is general—"He that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Some one has said, "No man can enter the kingdom of heaven with his head erect." The gate of heaven is low, and he who would enter must stoop; but when he has entered the lowly gate he shall find unspeakable glories on the other side.

The doctrines of repentance, confession, conviction of sin and the like are going out of fashion in these days. We think that we can grow into the spiritual life by a process so gradual that it shall not be perceived. There is no need, we fancy, to humble ourselves. We will simply conform our lives more and more to the accepted Christian standards, and by and by, almost before we know it, we shall wake up to find ourselves full-fledged Christian saints. Evolution is the popular

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catchword of the age. The phrase is interpreted as embodying a force or a process that works gradually and quite imperceptibly and yet brings about infinite results, and in the course of time transforms all manner of evil into highest good.

Multitudes to-day are trying to become Christians by this method. They are not conscious of any particular need in their lives. They feel sure that they are as good already as the great mass of Christians. They are a great deal better than some whom they see every Sabbath in the sanctuary. Their lives are clean and pure and exceedingly respectable. So they go regularly to church. They give more or less liberally to its support. They take a certain part in its activities and patronize it in every way. And they expect by this means, without any humiliating confessions of sin or need, gradually to obtain recognition as Christians and so to enter heaven at last.

But the spiritual life does not come to them. They are subject to continual disappointment. There is no such thing as gradual spiritualization. No one can become a Christian without repentance and conversion. No one can attain the lofty experiences and joys of sainthood without humbling himself.

True, there is a false and foolish abasement of self that injures the soul instead of uplifting it. To grovel is one thing, to humble oneself is quite another. The one is false and artificial, the other natural and necessary. The soul must be humbled before God or the spiritual life will not flow in with its fruits of peace and joy and glory.

But he who, forgetting his own dignity and pride, comes to God with a free and full acknowledgment of sin and need, he who feels with the publican that he is "*the sinner*," and humbles himself in the sinner's place, will never fail to receive tokens of God's forgiving love.

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To him the spiritual life and power will be granted. He shall have daily victory over sin. He shall enter into a daily more exalted fellowship with Jesus Christ. As his humility is continuous, continuous also shall be his exaltation. Not only shall he be justified, but he shall also be sanctified and glorified.

The Wise Use of Wealth

CHAPTER XXVII

The Wise Use of Wealth

THE UNRIGHTEOUS STEWARD

Luke 16:1-12

Text.—“*Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness.*”—Luke 16:9

TO discover truth in things false, to bring good out of things evil, to make darkness radiant with light, is characteristic of the Christ. He seizes the most untoward incident, and wrings from it a message of divine truth. He takes the vilest sinner and transforms him into a preacher of righteousness. He finds the leaven a universal symbol of corruption, transfigures it by a touch, and it becomes forever after a type of heavenly character. He lays hold of the serpent, hitherto the representative of Satan and the satanic, and impresses him into his service as an object-lesson of heavenly wisdom; he even makes him a yokefellow of the gentle dove in the eternal symbolism of the spiritual life. He takes the corrupt politician and the unscrupulous tradesman and, clothing them in the garb of parable, sends them forth as teachers of highest truth to the world.

In the opening verses of the sixteenth of Luke we have a case in point. It is the story of a criminal and his crime, used to impress a profound moral lesson. It is a picture of evil from which the Master derives suggestions of good for his disciples. Let us study the incident in the light of his criticism.

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The central figure of the picture is a steward, a negligent and wasteful steward. At the moment of his introduction he has been accused of unfaithfulness, and his employer has brought him to account. As always, the crisis reveals character. Hitherto he has been merely careless; now he becomes positively criminal. Instead of confessing his negligence and seeking forgiveness, with the opportunity to correct the evils of his administration, or in some way to make good the losses incurred, he adds knavery to neglect and fraud to faithlessness in order that he may escape the just retribution of his wrong-doing.

The man's action admits of no justification. He is the impersonation of utter dishonesty. His conduct illustrates the natural and rapid progress of evil in his quick stride from waste to wantonness. The accusation made against him at the outset does not of necessity imply moral wrong. His wastefulness might have been the result of incapacity. That there was real indolence and indifference appears only as we read the sequel. Only culpable negligence could have ripened so suddenly into fraudulent conspiracy.

Accused of wastefulness and threatened with discharge, he provides against future want by a system of "graft" that has never been surpassed by the most astute and corrupt of modern politicians.² His lord's income is derived from tenants who pay as rental an annual percentage of their harvests. The amount to be paid depends therefore in a large measure upon their own statements. Each makes out his "bill," which he gives to the steward, and payment is made upon that basis. Probably none but these two, the tenant and the steward, would know enough about the actual items involved intelligently to question the correctness of the bill.

In the brief time that remains for closing up his accounts, the steward of our parable visits such of his lord's debtors as he thinks may be tampered with. Of

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each he asks the question, "How much owest thou unto my lord?" and, on receiving answer, bids him make out his bill for a smaller amount. To one he offers a bribe of fifty per cent, to another of twenty, to each doubtless the largest sum that he thought the man's conscience or fear of detection would allow him to accept. By this means he wins the favor of many of his lord's debtors and at the same time so involves them in his own criminal action that they will not fail to care for him when his stewardship is taken away.

The nature of the scheme gave reasonable assurance of its secrecy, since the knowledge of it implied complicity in the fraud. Yet by some means the story leaks out and comes to the ears of the employer, and he cannot refrain from expressing his admiration. In spite of his own loss he commends the steward "because he had done wisely." Himself doubtless an unscrupulous man and dishonest in his dealings, he admires the superior knavery of an underling who could thus outwit him in the very hour of discovery and discharge, and could secure his own permanent comfort at the expense of a master whom he had already wronged. The very coolness and impudence of the man appealed to him. His promptness, energy and foresight were extraordinary. This wealthy landowner had been wont to look down upon the steward as his servant in social relations. He now discovers that he must look up to him as a master in high finance.

I do not feel sure that the steward was discharged after all. On the contrary, I can easily imagine this somewhat easy-going employer retaining him and entering into a partnership of rascality with him, hoping to profit by his masterly shrewdness. I can also imagine that in the course of years the relation of the two was reversed and that the steward became owner of vast estates and the former master became steward or underling. *bunk*

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Be that as it may, remember that it is *his* lord that commends him, not *our* Lord. No, not a word of commendation has Jesus for the rascally steward. He paints him as a rascal and only a rascal. Nevertheless, he finds in the incident lessons that are not without value for his own disciples. Though not sympathizing with it he appreciates the admiration of this injured employer for his knavish servant. "For," says he, "the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light."

One is tempted to pause here and to make this utterance the final lesson of the parable. It certainly suggests a most practical interpretation of the story. Christian men of to-day may well sit at the feet of their worldly neighbors, yes, even of the dishonest and unscrupulous, and learn from them many valuable lessons of thrift and energy and prudence. We Christians talk about the corruption of politics, the sordidness of commerce, the follies of society, but each of these phases of our worldly life is pregnant with suggestion for the betterment of Christian work.

No doubt modern politics are corrupt; yet modern religion may learn many a lesson of priceless value from politics. "How can I get the boys and girls to come to Sunday-school?" was the question asked by a young superintendent at a Sunday-school convention. "Count every Sunday an important election day, the schoolroom a polling place, and every youth a voter," was the quick response of the leader who chanced to be a ward politician. True enough! Let a tithe of the interest be manifested and of the effort be put forth by parents and Christian workers to bring our children to the Sunday-school that is made by politicians to bring voters to the polls, and every Sabbath-school would speedily be filled to overflowing.

Granted that modern commerce is sordid and selfish:

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yet commerce may serve at some points as the teacher of religion. The twentieth century merchant keeps up with the times. The twentieth century church is often very far behind the times. The merchant is perpetually on the lookout for attractive novelties. Many a church never offers either novelty or attraction. Until it is as easy to secure a quorum of church officers as of bank directors, until Christians will work as hard to save a soul as the business man works to save a dollar, until the disciples of Jesus display just as much energy and promptness and persistence in the business of the kingdom as they display in the conduct of their secular affairs, religion must sit at the feet of commerce and listen to her instruction.

And even society—gay, frivolous, selfish society—can teach Christians something. See how freely these votaries of pleasure spend their money for amusement, how they wear out their lives in pursuit of a "good time," how they toil and strive and sacrifice for trifles. Were the disciples of Jesus one-half as free in spending time and money and strength in his service, we should live in a perpetual revival.

When I see a great cause like that of temperance hard bested because the forces that make for sobriety are divided over a thousand and one minor points while their opponents sink all secondary matters in the one great issue, or when the Church of Jesus Christ is split up into numberless sects and parties by insignificant differences of creed and form while the hosts of evil march in solid columns to victory, I realize the eternal truth of the Master's words, "The sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light."

Striking as these words are, however, they were not designed by our Lord to embody the central lesson of the parable. On the contrary, they are merely incidental,

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a side-light upon the central truth, a comment upon the employer's admiration, and a connecting link between the action of the parable and the lesson it was intended to convey.

Plainly the emphasis of the whole rests upon those words, "I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles."

Taking this for our center we may easily trace out the circle of truth which the Great Teacher has described for us. As we go over the ground carefully, we shall find but one topic presented to us, viz., *The wise use of wealth.*

It is not without significance that the central figure of our parable is *a steward*. Two apostles have adopted the phrase in their letters and have made it symbolic of Christian service. *We are stewards of God.* No man has seen life as he ought to see it, no man has the proper perspective of existence, until he realizes that every blessing he enjoys, whether material or spiritual, his wealth, his talents, his time, his influence, his power, everything is God's, not given to him for his exclusive use and enjoyment, but committed to him that he may administer it for the common good and render account of it at last to the owner.

Men, even Christian men, are given to talking about their possessions as though they were the owners. They assume proprietary rights in the gifts of God. And when they use even a small fraction of that which God has entrusted to them for the advancement of the kingdom of heaven, when they help some needy brother or contribute to some missionary enterprise, they call it a "gift." We can never discover the true relations of life, the true measure of duty, the true standard of righteousness, till we change our view-point. We must put away

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this false notion of ownership and accept instead thereof the idea of stewardship. My money is not mine but God's. Your wits are not yours but God's. Alike the wealth of the millionaire, the skill of the artisan, the genius of the artist, the learning of the scholar, the beauty of the social queen, are gifts conferred by the Almighty to be administered faithfully, wisely, carefully for him in the redemption of the world.

The purpose of our stewardship is twofold—the glory of God and the blessing of man. Seen in the clearest light the two are identical, since the highest happiness and perfection of man is the only glory of God. He has no glory apart from that. We speak of using our gifts for God; but we can use them for him only as we use them for our fellow men. Any offering to God that does not bless man is an expression of error and superstition. True religion is always philanthropic, redemptive.

We are stewards of God, and the realm of our stewardship is all-comprehensive. It includes our material possessions, our personal qualities, our intellectual gifts, our moral characteristics, and also our spiritual experiences and attainments. All these are parts of our wealth. All are given us to be used for God in the service of man. In the story before us, however, material gifts only are mentioned as typical of all. The material element of life being lowest and least spiritual, if that be surrendered and brought into true alignment with the spirit of Christ, the rest will follow almost as a matter of course.

"The mammon of unrighteousness," our Lord calls it. In that phrase we find an ancient equivalent for the modern phrase, "Tainted money." Jesus clearly recognized the tendency of material wealth to produce selfishness and to lead to overt sin. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!" is his own exclamation, and he compares the rich man

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at heaven's gate to the camel trying to pass through a needle's eye.

From the beginning, wealth of all kinds has been the instrument of unrighteousness. Probably every dollar that has ever been issued has been tainted at some point in its circulation. Nevertheless, wealth is not evil in itself, nor is it a proof of evil in its possessor. Jesus plainly declares that it is possible to make a wise and righteous use of material wealth. His contrast between the "unrighteous mammon" and the "true riches" is a contrast of relations rather than of things, or it is a contrast between the material and the spiritual, between the temporal and the eternal.

Material things have no inherent moral character. The taint of unrighteousness does not abide in them continuously.² The money that has been tainted by wrong uses is cleansed again by right uses. Moral character reveals itself only in the spiritual relations of material things, the motives that inspire their acquisition and use, the ends to which they are applied.

Again, material things, however helpful and gratifying for a time, will soon pass away. Spiritual things are everlasting. We may so use the material blessings which God has entrusted to us that they become the great end of our existence and effort, and when they are gone we have nothing left; or we may make them a stepping-stone and passport to something higher, something that is permanent, and when at last they slip from our grasp we shall have instead that which is unspeakably more delightful and satisfying. So employed, material riches are like the seed which we cast into the earth, and when it gradually decays and disappears we have instead the growing plant with its foliage, its blossoms and its fruit reappearing perhaps through many years, or they are like the precious ointment that, as it evaporates, fills all surrounding space with its rich perfume.

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Take the most direct and literal suggestion of our Lord's words. A disciple may have worldly wealth, he may be prosperous in business or may have received a goodly inheritance. What shall he do with it? Two courses are open to him. On the one hand, he may suffer himself to become wholly absorbed in the enjoyment of these things. He may call them his own, using them in a selfish or indifferent manner, and they may bring him only the passing pleasure that shall cease with the loss of the gifts themselves. Or, on the other hand, he may recognize the great facts of stewardship and duty. He may administer the trust in such manner that he shall endear himself to all around by his beneficence and kindness. At length comes loss. By some misfortune his riches disappear and he is left in poverty. Then the friends made in his prosperous days, made by means of his wealth, rally around him and save him from want. Or, to carry the thought still further, he dies. Then we may believe that as he enters the other world he will not find himself a stranger in a strange land, for there will be many whom he has befriended who will await him and welcome him to that realm of bliss. That is no mere fancy but a blessed reality that leads the Christly soul to look forward to the reception into the next life by those whom he has helped in this world, even though it be in a purely material sense. Friends made by means of the mammon of unrighteousness shall receive us into the everlasting habitations. Thus the material and temporal good shall be transmuted into spiritual and eternal blessing.

There is a close and vital connection between this parable of The Unfaithful Steward and the parable of Dives and Lazarus which immediately follows it in Luke's narrative. They present two sides of one subject. The steward of the one and the rich man of the other are companion pictures hung side by side for the

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sake of contrast. One represents the wise, the other the unwise use of wealth.

In the parable before us the steward, though dishonest and unworthy, makes such a use of the wealth entrusted to him as to secure for himself a future welcome into the homes of his lord's debtors when he shall be thrust out of the stewardship. Upon the basis of this limited foresight for future needs, Jesus founds an exhortation to like wisdom for the eternal future in the use of opportunity. If this rascal is wise enough to so use his lord's wealth that he shall ensure the future when the trust is taken from him, why should not the disciple so use his divine trust that he shall be assured of a welcome when the material is for him no more?

In the following parable, Lazarus is welcomed into the abode of bliss, for he had clearly made friends with very little in this world, while Dives with all his riches had made no friends and entered the other world without a welcome. The contrast between the two pictures is marked, and while we may not press it too closely, it is certainly pregnant with a significant lesson.

The wisdom of the worldly man is for his own generation; the wisdom of the godly man is for eternity. The range of the one is limited; that of the other is infinite. Yet the godly man may learn many a lesson of true wisdom from his godless neighbor. The godless man practises thrift, economy, diligence, and the like, in order to satisfy present needs; for he says, "One must live." The godly man should surpass him in all right effort, for he, too, realizes the fact that one must live—*eternally*. The godless man husband his resources that he may "lay up for a rainy day"; the godly man should so husband his that he may have an abundance laid up for countless ages. The godless man provides against the probable; should not the godly man provide with equal care and wisdom for the certain? Even the ungodly man is often faithful in the discharge of a small

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trust in order that it may become a stepping-stone to larger opportunity; but he who, in the fear of God, faithfully administers the stewardship of this present time, shall find that earth itself is a stepping-stone to heaven and that the stewardship of time shall prepare him for the ownership of eternity.

An Impassable Barrier

CHAPTER XXVIII

An Impassable Barrier

DIVES AND LAZARUS

Luke 16:19-31

Text.—“*Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed.*”—Luke 16:26

IN the world of nature two forces are seen everywhere at work. We call them Attraction and Repulsion. They are opposite in direction and in effect. The former is always conservative, the latter destructive. Perhaps the simplest and most familiar illustration of their working is seen in the revolving wheel. The motion about the central shaft generates what is known as centrifugal force, that is, a repulsive force which tends to drive the particles of the wheel away from the center and from one another. The wheel would fly into countless fragments were it not for the operation of another and opposite force, known as centripetal, by which the particles composing the wheel are held fast together. If at any time the centrifugal force exceeds the centripetal, the wheel flies into fragments and is destroyed.

Now these two forces of nature are but types of two spiritual forces whose working we may observe no less readily. These are the forces of sin and holiness, of selfishness and love; the former repulsive, the latter attractive; the former destructive, the latter conservative. Everywhere sin operates to drive men apart and to destroy them, while the unfailing influence of righteous-

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ness and love is to attract men one to another and to make for their permanent safety and peace. The primitive story of the Eden life is undoubtedly true to nature, where we read that the result of the first conscious sin was to drive the guilty pair from the presence of God. And the force that separates is not the wrath of God, but the sin of man; for we find man hiding himself from the presence of God among the trees of the garden even before he realizes that his Creator knows of his disobedience. And ever since, when the power of sin and selfishness has exceeded the forces of righteousness, there have been division, mistrust, hostility, strife and a continuous effort towards destruction.

As sin operated to drive man from God, so it continually works as a repelling force driving men apart from one another and keeping them apart. To-day we find society divided into classes with diverse interests and clashing purposes. On the great industrial and economic questions men are unable to get together and to view these problems from a common standpoint. Why is it? Because the repelling force of sin and selfishness holds them apart.

Jesus gives us a vivid picture of the operation and ultimate effect of this repellent or divisive force in the parable of Dives and Lazarus.

Here are two men who represent antipodal conditions in society. First, "there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day." Then, "a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table."

It is a picture of comfortable wealth over against the most abject poverty. Nothing is said directly regarding the character of the two men thus described. We may, however, infer certain things. Regarding Lazarus, we inevitably conclude that his poverty is not the result of any unthrift or wrong-doing on his part, but of absolute

inability to labor because of disease. In fact, the whole tenor of the story leads us to think of him as a most worthy man who, like Job of old, works out through his privation and suffering some deep design of Providence. On the other hand, we have in the phrase, "yea, even the dogs came and licked his sores," an implied suggestion that the rich man with all his luxury never manifested the slightest compassion for poor Lazarus. There is no accusation of positive wickedness, no hint that his riches were dishonestly gained, or that they were spent in any sinful manner. It is only a picture of utter selfishness, a suggestion that the dogs of the street were more pitiful than he. Though near one another in locality, these men were being driven apart daily by the repellent power of the spirit of selfishness on the part of Dives.

They were separated in their lives, and they were also separated in their deaths. "The beggar died," says the story, "and . . . was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Of the other we read, "The rich man also died, and was buried."

Of course we recognize the first expression as figurative. It is merely borrowed from the familiar Jewish conception of the abode of the blessed. It does not teach that because a man is poor or suffers in this life he will surely find a compensating happiness in the next. It does teach, however, that poverty and lowliness in this life do not hinder the most perfect bliss hereafter. Lazarus was so poor that no mention is made of his burial, but only of his glorious reception into the heavenly life. No pageant attended him to his last earthly resting-place. He was doubtless hurried without ceremony into a pauper's grave. But when he has crossed the river he is met by a procession of angels and borne in state to the realms of light.

The rich man *was buried*. He received the customary honors from his fellow men. His wealth was sufficient to attract a crowd and to purchase the tokens of earthly

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pomp and show. Doubtless there were eulogies and flowers, and a costly tomb. But with the tomb the power of money came to an end. Not a word regarding the attendance of angels upon his departing spirit. Why? Because he was rich? No; but because he was selfish. He had not used his wealth to make friends who should greet his arrival in the other world with gladness. So far as this world was concerned, the contrast between the two men is chiefly a difference between great wealth and extreme poverty. It is a contrast based on possessions. Yet there is also the implied contrast of character. When they enter the other world, the merely superficial contrast disappears. Not what they have, but what they are determines their condition. The complete reversal of their relative positions is a mere incident of the story, not by any means the statement of a necessary law. Lazarus finds a ready welcome to the highest joys of the future world, not as a compensation for the poverty and trials endured in this world, but as the natural fruitage of a worthy character that had perchance been developed by means of these same trials. Nor is the lonely torment of the rich man in any sense a counterbalancing of his earthly comfort and wealth. He enters that life alone, because, having used his wealth selfishly, it had made him no friends who should come to greet his waiting spirit on the borders of the invisible land. He finds it a place of torment because, his riches left behind, he no longer has the means of gratifying his desires; because he cannot now occupy his mind with the pleasures of sense, and across the field of memory there come trooping a host of opportunities unimproved, the vision of a wasted life, an army of poor that his wealth might have relieved, of distressed ones to whom he might have given comfort, of downtrodden persons whom he might have lifted up. The ghostly shapes of regret and remorse, these are his tormentors.

As to the detailed description of Hades (which is

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simply a general term signifying the abode of the dead, both good and bad) we can say but little. Clearly it is foolish to found any doctrine upon a literal interpretation of the picture, since that is not original with the Master. For the most part our Saviour merely adopts the current notions of the time, which would be intelligible to his hearers and sufficient for his own purpose, without adding a word either of confirmation or of disapproval. At a few points the necessities of the story determine its form.

If any reader is inclined to sneer at the word "flame" which our Saviour uses figuratively, we ask, Is material fire worse than the torments of a guilty conscience? It is difficult to understand how any intelligent person can question the reality or the dreadfulfulness of future woe who has either experienced or observed the tormenting power of shame, remorse or even of sinful passion in the present life. How many a man is there in the world to-day who would willingly endure the burning of his body if he could by that means destroy the power of memory! We believe in the existence of a future hell, not because we have been taught so, but because we may see thousands of men living in hell to-day; and there is nothing in Scripture, philosophy, nature, or reason which gives us the slightest ground for expecting that it will be otherwise with them hereafter unless they undergo a complete change in character and mode of life.

But this is, after all, aside from the central purpose and teaching of our parable. That is brought out in a single expression. As in the dramatic representation Dives pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to him with a drop of comfort, the reply comes, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they that would pass from hence to you may not be able." What is this gulf? And by whom was it fixed there? One of our ablest expositors speaks of it as "the gulf which God had fixed."

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Is not that a false accusation against God? What had he to do with fixing it there? The only person in the universe who could put that gulf there was Dives himself. And he had done it with the devil's aid.

You all know how that is. The gulf was fixed between Dives and Lazarus long before they died. Dives had surrounded himself with an impassable barrier of pride and selfishness and arrogance. Lazarus could not come anywhere near him. Every day that barrier had become broader, deeper, and more impassable. Explosions of violent wrath had torn deep and yawning fissures. Little words and deeds of unkindness had shelved away its banks, haughty looks and heartless words had dredged its channel deep and wide, until that which was at first a narrow rift over which the men might easily have clasped hands had become a chasm which might not be passed.

Were you never conscious of placing a like gulf between yourself and some friend? You had been in closest friendship, with free exchange of love and sympathy. But in a moment of anger or thoughtlessness you did that friend a wrong. It may be you spoke an unkind word, or were guilty of a mean action. What was the result? Why, something seemed to come between your heart and the heart of your friend that parted you. Your friend may have forgotten the word or the act in an hour, but you could not forget it. There it stood between you, perhaps still stands; and no kindness or forgetfulness on his part can remove it. Only yourself can do that by confession and reparation to the utmost of your ability. Until you thus make confession and reparation a persistent sense of restraint on your own part will hamper your intercourse; and if this be in some degree deadened by the passage of time, there will yet be no restoration of the former perfect frankness.

So men by their sins and their selfishness are daily placing a gulf between themselves and God or between

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themselves and their fellows. And every such gulf must remain through eternity if it be not removed by the very persons who placed it there.

Here is the key to the failure of many an effort at social reform. It begins at the wrong end. Two classes of society become separated by the repellent power of selfishness, and eager reformers strive to remove the gulf between them. They preach to each class concerning the wrong-doings of the other, and each seeks to reform his neighbor. Now, social gulfs can never be removed in that way. Jesus declared the true method. "Cast out first the beam out of thine own eye." Each class must correct the wrongs within its own circle. Divisions and antagonisms will be removed when men become more ready to repair the wrongs themselves have done than to compel others to mend their faulty ways.

We cannot dogmatize upon the conditions and possibilities of the future state. I have already intimated that it will not do to press the figures of our parable too closely. Nevertheless there is in that word "fixed" a certain profound and solemn suggestion. Does it imply that there is no possibility of change or repentance after death? Are we indeed

"Fixed in an eternal state"?

Any attempt to answer that question would be mere speculation. But there are certain familiar facts which none can dispute.

Everywhere we may see this tendency of things to become fixed. A habit long indulged fastens itself upon us with ever-increasing force. It is harder to shake off with every passing day. So with a feeling or a passion. So with the gulf that parts our friendship or sunders our relations. Who does a wrong and neglects to make reparation finds that every moment of delay makes it increasingly difficult to restore the old relations. May

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it not be that after years of delay this difficulty shall harden into impossibility? The modern scientific ideal of the reign of law gives sinful men less hope in this direction than does the Bible. *Now* we are able to bridge these gulfs or even to close them. Do we know that we shall be able to do so hereafter? It is a terrible fact which we may all see illustrated daily that a man may do in a moment what he cannot undo in a thousand years. May we not, therefore, do in this life that which we cannot undo in eternity?

The closing scene of the parable represents Dives as asking that Lazarus be sent to warn his brethren against following in his footsteps. But Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." Dives persists, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent." But Abraham gives the final blow to his hopes with the words, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead."

In other words, every man has sufficient light to guide him to righteousness of life in this world and to salvation in the next. The conditions of the future world are not wholly dissimilar to present conditions. Its light and truth will not be utterly new, but will be the infinite and glorious completeness of that which we now have in part. If men reject present light because it reveals too clearly the imperfections and weaknesses of human character, how much more would they reject that perfect light which would bring out every flaw and stain before the eyes of a gazing world! It is true beyond a peradventure that where natural influences fail to turn the heart from sin, supernatural forces are utterly useless. He who will not listen to the message of God as it comes through the commonplace human messenger, would only ridicule a message sent at the hand of angels or spirits.

I find in this concluding dialogue not a new and independent truth, but only one more ray of light shining

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upon our central thought. In the clear and sufficient light of present knowledge we suffer ourselves to fix broad gulfs between our souls and our fellows. We see those gulfs being made daily broader and deeper. We note the operation of laws which threaten to make them permanent and impassable, yet we do not arouse ourselves to the work of removing them. We quiet our fears with the delusive notion that supernatural influences and forces will accomplish what the natural forces have failed to do; that the laws which we here see and feel will be wholly subverted in their action by other laws and forces of which we now know nothing.

Jesus appeals to our reason by revealing destiny not as the judgment of an arbitrary and omnipotent God, but as the natural and necessary fruitage of our own conduct and spirit. Within our ken and control are these two great spiritual forces of attraction and repulsion. We may so ally ourselves with the forces of repulsion—selfishness, sin, greed, pride, arrogance—that we shall thrust ourselves out of the society of all the good and the true and the loving both now and in eternity. Or, on the other hand, we may make our own the attractive forces of the Spirit. Our lives may be filled with the power of love, of righteousness, of self-sacrifice, and of truth, and so we may weave our lives into an ever-growing fellowship of good, into that universe of blessedness where

“All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.”

The Empty House

CHAPTER XXIX

The Empty House

SPIRITUAL RELAPSE

Matt. 12:43-45

Text.—“*He findeth it empty.*”—Matt. 12:44

IN any sickness a relapse is more to be dreaded than the original attack. Not only is the patient weaker and less able to withstand the attack, but the disease itself is usually more violent and deadly. Hence the wise physician guards most carefully against such a catastrophe. He does not satisfy himself with merely driving out the intruder from the system, but seeks to build up the strength of his patient and to restore him to a condition of positive health so that the returning germs may find no congenial lodgment or even avenue of entrance into the organism of the body.

In the treatment of bodily ills this principle is universally recognized to-day, and we think more of cultivating positive health than of the mere resistance or expulsion of disease. The time is surely coming when we shall cease to estimate the skill and worth of a physician by the number of his cures or even the greatness of them, and shall measure his value to the community by the fewness of his cases. More and more clearly is it being seen that the true function of the medical profession is to build up positive health in individuals and the community, and not merely to cure or drive out disease.

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When, however, we deal with moral and spiritual ills, we are commonly satisfied with merely negative effort. Our sole care is to expel evil, and we often fail to fortify the life by the positive cultivation of the good. What wonder if we are disheartened by many a fatal relapse?

It is this spiritual failure, resulting from inadequate aims and methods in religious work, that confronted our Lord and called forth the parable of which our text is the focus.

The story is incomplete, in fact it can scarcely be called a story at all, yet it is exceedingly vivid and dramatic. Perhaps it is based upon some one of our Lord's many miracles, the beneficent purpose of which had been frustrated by the neglect of the one in whom it had been wrought. However that may be, the circumstances of condition and result are put before us in the most unmistakable fashion, and the meaning of the picture is self-evident.

A demoniac has been set free from his terrible thralldom, but has made no use of his freedom. The restored mind is left vacant, the life is empty. The unclean spirit personified is represented as wandering about in the vain search for some other dwelling-place, and finally as returning to find his former abode "empty, swept, and garnished." What is the result? He calls other spirits to enter with him and take new and stronger possession. In other words, there is a relapse of insanity with sevenfold increase of violence. Though allegorical in form, the sketch is a literal description of disease and relapse because of inadequate treatment. And in the most literal interpretation it is remarkably true to the modern germ theories of disease. The focus of the story is in the words, "He findeth it empty." On this point all the lines of the picture converge. Here is the kernel of the truth.

I have said that it was spiritual failure resulting from inadequate aims and methods in religious work that called

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forth this first recorded parable of Jesus. It is like failure, oft-repeated in our own lives and experience, that gives to the parable its present interest, yes, that makes its lesson of perennial value.

An interpretation of the parable seems almost unnecessary. Its meaning lies on its very surface. That empty dwelling represents not merely a vacant mind inviting the return of the evicted demon, it also mirrors many an empty life, from which demons of sin in various forms have been expelled, but which has never been filled with positive virtue or worthy activity. The message of the parable is a message of warning against the folly of merely negative effort in the battle with sin whether it be in our hearts or in the world. Such effort it declares to be futile. It is not enough to free a life from evil, to drive out a given wrong from a community. If the work is to be permanent and successful, if it is to have any real moral value, there must follow some positive work by which the life shall be filled with that which is good. Otherwise the relief will be temporary and a reaction will surely follow. If the cleansed abode be left unoccupied, the powers of evil will surely return and entrench themselves anew with multiplied force.

To put the theme of the parable in a single sentence, it teaches us that *Emptiness invites evil*.

Natural scientists have expressed the same truth in other words. They tell us that "Nature abhors a vacuum." That is to say, emptiness is unnatural. They might almost say that emptiness is impossible and unthinkable. Certainly it is contrary to the divine order in the universe. Seek where you will you cannot find a really empty space in the natural world. Remove any substance from a given place and something else immediately comes in to fill the space thus vacated. Every school-boy or girl is familiar with this law of matter. I take a glass filled with water and pour out the contents. The place originally occupied by the water is immediately

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filled with air. To prove this I have only to fill the glass with water once more and carefully place a sheet of stiff paper over the top in such a manner as to exclude the air. I can then invert the glass, holding it with its mouth downwards, and the water will remain in the glass and keep the paper in its place. Why is this? Because there is no opening for the admission of air, and the water cannot come out till something else is admitted to take its place. Leave never so small an opening for the admission of air, and water and paper will fall to the ground in an instant. It is a matter of great difficulty, if not an absolute impossibility, to produce a vacuum for any purpose.

Now what is true in nature is equally true in life. Fulness is the divine order in the one sphere as truly as in the other. The empty life violates a fundamental law of nature. It is an anomaly. Not only so, but an unused faculty or element of life, a vacant apartment in the spiritual structure, is unnatural. The perfect man is the full man, the complete man, the man with every appetite and passion, every faculty and power, perfectly developed and wholly devoted to its appointed service.

Emptiness is not holiness, though it is often mistaken for that, and is made the end of religious or moral effort. How often, for example, do men speak of the Ten Commandments as "The Moral Law." Now as a matter of fact there is not the smallest item of morality in the Decalogue. Those commands are mostly negative and prohibitory. They are mere injunctions against immorality. One may keep the Ten Commandments perfectly and yet be utterly wanting in moral character.

A like notion inspires the everlasting "Don't" which renders miserable the lives of so many children. And we may find not a few Christian disciples whose religious ideals are summed up in the phrase, "To keep himself unspotted from the world." "But," you say, "is not that ideal warranted by the Scriptures? Is it not the ideal

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which the apostle James has given to us?" Not by any means. Those words form only a part of James' religious ideal, and the last part at that. They are a sort of spiritual afterthought. He lays down as first in importance certain positive and Christly service.

Our parable suggests several truths that have been made familiar by the common experience of multitudes of unsuccessful workers in the field of morals and religion. First of these is the difficulty of maintaining an empty life. We know how difficult it is to produce and maintain even an approximate vacuum in the material world. The instruments and vessels must be strong and well made. Even then you must be content with partial and imperfect results. It requires far greater strength to hold nothing than to hold something, whatever that something may be. Not otherwise is it with the life.

Here and there we see a man who can drive out some evil habit or appetite or tendency from his life and keep it out by sheer strength of will, but such men are few. Where one succeeds hundreds fail. We wonder at the weakness of men in the face of temptation, and blame them for yielding, but we often fail to realize the greatness of the task set for them.

What is true in the individual life is not less true in the community or the State. The difficulty of enforcing prohibitory laws is proverbial. We secure a prohibitory enactment in the city or State and then call upon our officials to enforce it. Do they fulfil our expectations? Not once in a hundred times. Occasionally there arises an official of extraordinary energy and devotion who enforces the law when conditions are favorable. But it calls for continual watchfulness and unflagging zeal. Even then the chances are that for the sake of the one ordinance many others are neglected. A Neal Dow becomes famous for his enforcement of prohibition in his own State, but he does not stand as a model executive in other matters. So difficult a task is it to enforce pro-

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hibitory laws that it can only be done at the expense of other important public duties, and then there come frequent and fatal reactions both in official zeal and public opinion.

The fact is that every vice whether individual or public represents a need of the life. It fills a part of the life. To repress the vice without doing anything further is to leave the need unsatisfied, that portion of life vacant, and unless something else is given to supply the need or to fill the emptied space, the life thus left vacant offers a perpetual and urgent invitation for the return of evil.

Again, our parable depicts not only the difficulty but also *the danger of an empty life*. The old proverb,

“Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do,”

is proving itself true every day. The young men and women from our quiet country towns come to the city to seek a living. We recognize this transition as a time of peculiar danger. Many a life that has been sober, safe and promising in its early surroundings quickly becomes the prey of evil amid the new scenes. Why? Is the youth liable to temptation from shopmates while busy at his tasks? No. The time of danger is in the evening hours when the toil of the day is over and there is nothing to do. The familiar occupations and pleasures, the numerous companionships of the old home are gone, and time hangs heavily on the hands. Then comes the feeling of loneliness and vacancy, and almost any invitation is accepted as a means of filling the empty hours. So it comes to pass that the idle hours of evening have been the fatal weakness of many a young life. From these idle hours has dated the beginning of wrong-doing.

What is the period of danger in the life of a nation? Is it the time of error and superstition? Is it the time

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when the people believe in false gods and blindly accept the teachings of paganism? No. It is rather the period of religious vacancy which intervenes between the reign of the false and the true. It is that period when the people, convinced that the old religion is worthless, have cast it aside and have not yet received any other faith in its place. Agnosticism or doubt is infinitely more dangerous than even false religion. It is spiritual emptiness which opens a willing door to temptation.

Spiritual emptiness is spiritual danger alike for youth and for nations. There is safety in fulness. Temptation finds no avenue of entrance into the occupied soul. The busy life escapes many an assault that would be fatal to the idler. We know not how much of our immunity from moral evil we owe to the burdens that fill our lives and of which we often complain most bitterly.

Furthermore, *the empty life is the useless life*. The world is no richer for any number of lives that are merely free from evil. The most respectable and spotless doing nothing merely leaves a blank page in the volume of history. It is positive virtue, active righteousness that blesses the world.

The religion of the Jews was a religion of emptiness. Their ideal of righteousness seemed to be mere inaction. To them the holiness of the Sabbath demanded the prohibition of all labor of whatsoever sort. In the numberless prohibitions by which they interpreted and refined the simple statements of the Fourth Commandment they betray the notion that inaction or vacuity is holiness. To do nothing on the Sabbath was to hallow the day most perfectly.

The same religious ideal has prevailed in all ages. It prevails to-day. Most of us believe that true piety consists largely in not doing wrong. In contrast with this notion stands the gospel of Jesus Christ which is above all things else a positive gospel. Its key-word is "Fulness." "Of his fulness have all we received," says John.

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And Paul, grasping the true sense of the divine will, prays for his brethren that they may "be filled with all the fulness of God."

"The fulness of God"—that should be our thought for ourselves and for all men. Not to lop off a vice here and there; not to repress or drive out different forms of evil and to leave the life clean but empty, but to fill all life with a divine fulness, to cultivate in all men a spirit of positive righteousness, to employ every power and to occupy every element of our human nature with holy service—that should be the aim.

If emptiness invites evil, *fulness assures freedom*. The great Dr. Chalmers of Scotland has a notable sermon on "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." There is the gospel in a nutshell. Evil driven out and kept out by the infilling of divine love—there is the secret of easy and permanent triumph over temptation. There is the infallible recipe for a strong and growing moral character. Fill the life with the love of God. Fill the mind with holy thoughts. Fill the soul with heavenly aspirations. Fill the hands with Christly deeds. And without effort, almost without consciousness, the sinful thoughts and words and deeds will be expelled and kept out of the life. The disease of sin will be naturally and permanently displaced by the growing power of a positive moral and spiritual health.

The Proof of Obedience

CHAPTER XXX

The Proof of Obedience

THE TWO SONS

Matt. 21:28-32

Text.—“*Which of the two did the will of his father?*”—Matt. 21:31

OPPPOSITION from the chief priests and elders called forth this parable, and to them it is primarily addressed. They had confronted Jesus in the midst of his beneficent work and had challenged his authority. In a brief but effectual manner he had answered their challenge and silenced their criticism. Now he makes a positive attack upon their own claims as religious teachers, with one parable forcing them to self-condemnation, with a second leading them to pronounce sentence upon themselves, and finally closing in upon them with a third which was well calculated to drive the truth home to their hearts.

The parable of The Two Sons, to which our present thought will be given, follows close upon the discussion of authority. Its purpose is to convict these captious critics of their unfitness to challenge the authority of the speaker or to criticize his work. Its method is to contrast them with a class of persons whom they despised to their own manifest disadvantage.

The details of the story are few and exceedingly simple. There is no mistaking the personality of the father or the significance of his command, “Go work to-day in

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my vineyard." It is a common representation of the heavenly Father's call to obedience and service.

The first son, with his surly "I will not" followed by repentance and active obedience, plainly stands for those who had rudely disregarded the commands of God, living in open sin, but had been touched by the power of the Spirit and brought to repentance—the publicans and sinners who had welcomed the preaching of John the Baptist and had profited by it.

The second son, with his ready "I go, sir" that is not followed by obedient action, no less clearly represents those who profess a willingness to obey God, who fall in with the approved forms and services of religion, but who really live for themselves alone. In short, he represents the chief priests and elders themselves with their respectability and conventional piety which had not in it a single spark of love for God or genuine devotion to his service.

The story ended, the Master guards against any false application and compels attention to its vital point by the question, "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" To that question there can be but one answer, and the hearers reply as with a single voice, "The first."

Then comes the home thrust of personal application which is now absolutely unavoidable. "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

Thus these men who professed to recognize God's authority, setting themselves up as champions of religion and defenders of the faith, are self-convicted of utter irreligion. By their own judgment they are declared to be the disobedient ones, wholly indifferent to

the authority which they acknowledge. Their very quibblings about authority and their refinements of law and precept are but schemes for evading obedience to that divine will to which they profess unswerving allegiance.

So much for the historic setting. That is only the frame of the mirror. Let us now look into the polished surface of the mirror itself that we may discover what larger truth it will reveal to us. The story reflects the American life of to-day as clearly as it did the Jewish life of our Lord's time. The chief priests and elders are away in the background now. Let them fade wholly from sight. Those faces right at the front are yours and mine. Preachers of the gospel, leading church-members, highly reputable citizens are here reflected.

Before we study the figures reflected in its surface, let us carefully adjust the mirror lest it send back to us a distorted image. In other words, let us make sure that we get the details of the story each in its proper relation and with the true emphasis.

Where is the focus of the parable? Upon what point does the significant emphasis rest? On the answers which the young men gave to their father's command? Clearly not; else Jesus would have made that the point of his application. He concentrates the thought, not upon their answers, but upon their action. In the light of his interpretation the force and meaning of the parable lie in the contrasted verbs, "went" and "went not." It is a picture of obedience in contrast with disobedience. It is doing over against not doing.

No distinct point is made regarding the answers of the two sons. They have no independent significance in the story. Their purpose is merely tributary. Their import lies in the added emphasis which they give to the contrasted action. The first refusal of the one makes the final obedience more noticeable, as first assent renders more conspicuous the final disobedience of the other.

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Let us dwell upon this point a moment longer, for it is vital. A superficial interpretation of this part of the parable has made it an apparent extenuation of real unrighteousness. Let us then be very clear as to its exact bearing at the outset. Neither in the narrative itself nor in its application by our Lord is there any approval of the rude "I will not" of the first son. His answer is not excused or condoned. There it stands with its own condemnation stamped upon its very face. It is wholly wrong. It has no merit, but is inexcusable. It is not an aid to obedience. It does not bespeak anything good in him who utters it, not even frankness; for boorishness is not frankness. We find in the answer no promise of coming repentance and service. So far as it goes, it is a promise of disobedience; hence it is evil and only evil. In itself it is a serious obstacle to right action. The obedience that followed is rendered more difficult and unlikely by this refusal.

Again, fix firmly in your mind the fact that the vital contrast in the picture is the contrast between doing and not doing. The parable is not a popular tirade on "Practise versus Profession." The action of the first son, expressed in the words, "Afterward he repented, and went," is not in any way set over against the answer of the second, "I go, sir." No comparison is made or implied between works and words. Action is contrasted with inaction; and the counter contrast of the replies is simply a side-light by which the central truth is more vividly illuminated.

We shall miss the point of the parable if we ask, "Which was the better of the two sons?" or, "Which of the sons did Jesus approve?" We are not concerned with comparative goodness. Jesus did not approve either of the young men. Both of them did wrong. But the first, becoming ashamed of his wrong-doing, repents and begins to do right. And that is the only commendable thing about him. The single question which the

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parable is designed to enforce is one of obedience and disobedience. It is embodied in the words, "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?"

Interpreting the parable, it is very natural to say, The two sons represent two contrasted classes of men. In one we see the type of that class who have come to God by repentance from lives of open sin and ungodliness. Having forsaken their evil ways they have given themselves to humble obedience and hearty service. The other is a picture of those more respectable and pliable persons who, with an easy-going conformity to popular ideals, have declared their purpose to live in obedience to the divine commands, but whose daily lives do not make good their promise.

It is no uncommon thing for an out-and-out sinner, standing upon the supposed ground of this parable, to rail at the hypocrite within the Christian Church and to take great credit to himself for his own sincerity; as though Jesus had instituted a contrast between blasphemy or vileness and hypocrisy, commending the one and condemning the other.

Such a use of the parable grows out of two false or at least groundless assumptions. First, it assumes that the answer of the first son, "I will not," is in itself praiseworthy. Again, it assumes that the "I go, sir," of the second was intentionally untrue. In point of fact neither of these assumptions is warranted by the story. On the contrary every intelligent reader of the New Testament must feel that the reply of the first son was altogether rude and unfilial. Had he made his words true by actual disobedience, his conduct would present no redeeming feature. He is saved from unqualified condemnation only by his subsequent shame, repentance, and diligent service. And as to the second, whatever its purpose, his answer is the only one befitting a true and loyal son. It is clearly framed by the Master to win our approval, and the ground of condemnation is not hypocrisy in word,

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but failure in deed. We may well grant that at the moment of speaking he meant what he said, and that he really intended to go to work. Give him the benefit of the doubt. Still, he is a disobedient son. Neglect is no less fatal to obedience than is hypocrisy.

Could anything be more absurd, in the light of this parable, than the attitude of the man who says, "I make no profession, therefore nothing is to be expected of me?" Did the refusal of the first son in the slightest degree lessen the pressure of his duty to obey his father? Or did the assent of the second add a feather's weight to his responsibility? Of course not. They were sons, and that word "son" is not meaningless. Each was in duty bound to obey the father. So every man is in duty bound to obey God and to render him willing service. Duty is an absolute and universal matter growing out of our natural relations to God and our fellow men. It is not in any degree conditioned upon our personal acknowledgment or repudiation. The church-member is no more bound to live uprightly than the non-church-member. The most outspoken unbeliever in the community is just as truly responsible for the preaching of the gospel and the conduct of highest philanthropies as is the devout churchman or the most active Christian worker.

We waste a great deal of time and mental energy comparing or contrasting sins. We ask which is worse, our sin or the sin of our neighbor, and we are pretty sure to conclude that his is the worse. Jesus brings us directly to the vital issue. All disobedience is sin, and will if persisted in result in spiritual death. The one great question for every life is not, Am I better than some one else? but, Am I doing the will of the heavenly Father? Am I living up to the standard of duty that God places before me?

If, therefore, we must find two classes whom the sons represent, the first class would be composed of repenting sinners, earnestly striving to atone for past wrong by

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present faithfulness and diligence; the second, of those who, declaring their purpose to obey God, for any reason fail to render the promised service. Unrepentant sinners, however frank they may be in acknowledging their position, cannot find shelter in any part of this story. Its one appeal is to repentance and loving service.

Can we not, however, come closer to the heart of the parable than is possible by this method? Will it not speak to us more effectively if we put away all thought of contrasting classes of men or anything else outside of ourselves? Let each one of us search for his own moral features in both the sons. Forget everybody else for a moment. Here are two relations in which any one of us may stand towards God. Here are two attitudes of heart, two courses of action quite possible to you and to me—may I not say, two attitudes often exemplified in us?

You may have said to the commands of God, you may be saying at this moment, "I will not." Now look in this mirror and see whether your attitude is one to be proud of. Is the first view of that first son a pleasing one? Do not look at the other son. We have nothing to do with him just now. Do not begin to say, "Well, I may be disobedient, but at all events I am no hypocrite." What of that? Will it help the man who is dying of smallpox in the hospital to say with a complacent sneer, "Well, I may be very sick, but I haven't the yellow fever like that miserable fellow over there in the next cot"? Of course not, you say. Neither will it help you in any way to point to some other sinner who is worse in your estimation than yourself. Comparisons are useless. Worse than that, they may be fatal. Keep your eye on the one man. Is he doing the will of his father? No. He is rebellious, disobedient, wicked. He is trying to buttress his disobedience with refusal. And that is a picture of yourself. Do you admire it? Do you feel like boasting of it? No, no! Its one message to you is "Re-

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pent!" Prove by future obedience that you are ashamed of present sin. Let the first son be your model, but not in his ungracious denial. Imitate his penitent service. Let the faithfulness of your endeavor and the willingness of your sacrifice be the witnesses of your sincerity. Do not cheat yourself with the notion that mere blunt honesty, unblushing candor, is praiseworthy. But one thing is praiseworthy—to do the will of your heavenly Father.

Again, I may be like the second son, assenting to the commands of God in an easy, good-natured sort of a way, meaning to obey them, yet never fulfilling my promise because of neglect or temptation. Nothing is easier and few things more common than to mistake mere assent to divine truth for obedience to the divine will. A great deal of our modern Christianity consists in simply saying, "I go, sir," to God, and does not represent any form of doing God's will. We recite our well-framed creeds, we say "Amen" to our prayers, with apparent fervor, but our lives are not affected thereby. We do not translate our creeds and our prayers into deeds of righteousness and love.

Not a few of us satisfy ourselves with being well disposed towards religion. We enjoy the preaching of the gospel. We take delight in the forms of worship and the services of God's house, and are desirous that they should be the best possible. We wish to be numbered among the obedient children of God because we regularly patronize the church and her services, but we are not always careful to ask whether in our daily lives we are doing the will of the Father.

Now religious enjoyment is not Christianity. Hearing, believing, admiring truth is not obedience to God. It will not save our own souls nor help others. We must do the truth if it is to bless anybody. We must not only believe and admire the words of Jesus, we must obey them, if they are to exert a regenerating force in and through us.

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I see in the second son also a preacher of repentance. I hear him utter the words of warning, "Stay not with saying, I go; but go, work." Make your practise accord with your profession. Make your life enforce your creed. Carry out your good intentions, or they will prove a snare to you. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven."

The mirror reflects living truth. At this moment the heavenly Father is saying to each one of us, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." On every hand are the calls for service that are the echoes of the Father's voice. You may hear that voice in every gospel appeal to surrender, confession and consecration. You may see that beckoning hand in every life that needs your help, in every cause that needs assistance and every wrong that needs resistance. The vineyard of the Lord is all about you, not far off, but close at hand; and in it there is work enough for every obedient son. For want of laborers the weeds are growing and the vines are drooping. Not one of us but may find countless opportunities of service for God and man. It is a call to arduous toil, to patient and ceaseless endeavor. And the call is immediate—"Go, work to-day."

The Irrepressible Conflict

CHAPTER XXXI

The Irrepressible Conflict

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Matt. 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16

Text.—“*The inheritance shall be ours.*”—Mark 12:7

THE Irrepressible Conflict” is a conflict of wills. The endless struggle between good and ill, between right and wrong, between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, is at bottom a struggle between self-will and the will of God. The fall of man resulted from the first assertion of self-will in rebellion against divine law. Complete redemption will follow complete and unconditional surrender of the human will to the will of the heavenly Father. Meanwhile the one sin and danger of the race, the sin that embraces and comprehends all other sin, the danger that overhangs every other danger, is the assertion of self-will on the part of the child and the determination to make self-will supreme.

This is the truth expressed in the parable of The Vineyard and the Husbandman. Originally and superficially it is a parable of Jewish history. In its details we see an accurate picture of the dealings of Jehovah with Israel and the return which the Jewish people made to his love. “Planted a vineyard,” “Set a hedge,” “Digged a winepress,” “Built a tower,” what are these but so many types of the special care and blessing bestowed

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upon the "chosen people"? Do they not suggest specifically the founding of the nation, the wonderful separation of the one people from all others, the peculiar opportunities for service enjoyed, and the divine revelation committed to them? Do they not at the same time present a cumulative reason for national obedience and fruitfulness in the service of God?

The successive messengers who were sent to receive the fruits of the vineyard on behalf of their lord, do they not call to our minds the long line of prophets who came to Israel only to be rejected and driven out with bitter persecution? Elijah pursued by the ceaseless hatred of Ahab and Jezebel, Zechariah stoned to death in the reign of Joash, Jeremiah imprisoned in the foulest of dungeons, Isaiah sawn asunder by order of Manasseh, and, last of all, John the Baptist beheaded to satisfy the wrath of Herod's guilty wife—these all came as messengers of God calling for the fruits of godliness in the life of the nation; and one after another they were "beaten," "shamefully handled," or "killed." After these comes the Son in the person of Jesus himself, with the foreshadowing of his death.

Is it strange that his hearers "perceived that he spake this parable against them"? Would they not have been stupid indeed had they failed to note the parallelism? The application of his words is clear as midday. And is it not equally clear that Jesus sums up the reason both of their fathers' hatred of the prophets and of their own opposition to himself in the words, "the inheritance shall be ours"? Ahab, Manasseh and Herod were very different men from the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's time; but they had one quality in common with them—self-will. This it was that persecuted the prophets, and this it was that even now conspired to slay the Christ. Had the prophets conformed their message to the will of the people, they would have been canonized as saints and subsidized as statesmen. Had Jesus

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obeyed the will of the recognized religious teachers of his age instead of making the will of God supreme, he would have been received by them with open arms, proclaimed by them as the expected Messiah, and they would have followed him to the death. But with Jesus it was, "Thy will be done," while with the Pharisees it was, "Our will be done." Between these two there can be only the most deadly enmity.

Such is the original message of our parable as clearly revealed in its setting and confirmed by its effect. For those who heard it, this message was final and vital. For us it is secondary and unimportant. We may be interested to note the bearing of the Master's words upon his Jewish auditors, but if we stay with that, the parable will be of trifling value to ourselves. It is for us to seek its present message, its living and permanent message.

With the clearer light of a world gospel, let us cast the picture on the larger screen of universal human life and conduct. The Jews perceived that he spake of them. It is for you and me to see that he speaks of us. The parable is a reflection of human life in general, of our lives in particular. Let us draw the lines on this larger scale.

"A man planted a vineyard." Every nation, every human life, is a planting of the Lord. To each one of us God has given talents, resources, privileges, possibilities, the varied elements of our common life; and these are the soil from which may be produced all the fruits of noblest manhood to enrich the kingdom of God. More than this, has not every life its hedge of divine Providence protecting it from enemies that would mar its fruitfulness? Is any life without its wine-press of opportunity or its tower of revelation?

God has not held these things in his own keeping, to be worked by slaves. He has let them out to us, free, independent husbandmen. All these marvelous gifts of

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God are in the hands of men, in your hands and mine, to be used as we will. But with such provision has he not a right to expect the fruits of personal development, of human progress, of righteous living, of a continual growth and perfecting of the race through the growth and perfection of individuals?

It is a grand truth that we are stewards of God. For stewardship implies two elements of greatness—freedom and responsibility. The vineyard is in our hands and we can do as we please with it so long as it remains with us. We may cultivate it thoroughly and make it bring forth abundantly, or we may neglect it and let it grow up to weeds and unfruitfulness.

In this freedom lies the secret of largest possibilities for our life. God might have made us mere machines, doing his will from necessity. He might have made us mere animals, creatures of instinct, capable of nothing but to look on while he wrought out every change by the direct action of his own power. But had he done so, the infinite possibilities of the divine life would not have been ours.

We are free, and our freedom is the ground of our duty. For this very cause we should be diligent, earnest, faithful. The slave has no duty, no responsibility, because he has no liberty of action and no hope of attainment. Our liberty is complete, our hope boundless; therefore God may justly look to us for the fruits of attainment and service.

Thus far the reflection is clear enough. Thus far we can see that Jesus spoke of us. We all doubtless recognize the fact that we are husbandmen in the Lord's vineyard, in duty bound to cultivate it faithfully and to render to him the fruits. But how about the next point? Can that have any bearing upon our lives? The rejected messengers, who are they? Surely we have never ill-treated the Lord's prophets. We have never stoned or slain them. Have we not? Think a moment.

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How long is it since Lovejoy, a prophet of the anti-slavery movement, was slain in the streets of an American city, and many others bearing the same message were hooted and mobbed? Has not more than one active temperance reformer shared the same fate? Are not many earnest social reformers sneered at and boycotted by even nominally Christian people?

But these are public and national. What of the personal? Have you never refused to listen when some one pointed out to you an unwelcome duty? Have you never slain a friendship because the friend was too frank in speaking of your failings or of your responsibilities? Have you never cast stones of slander or ridicule at one who presumed to demand of you the fruit of positive service or of personal devotion?

We are not talking just now of matters purely religious. These servants of the householder do not all wear black coats and white ties. They come to us in many forms, but we have no doubt as to their commission. Wherever one reveals to you an opportunity to do good or offers to you the chance to take an advance step in your life, wherever one points to a wrong which you can help to right or an evil which you can help to remove, wherever one shows a service that you can render or a truth that you can champion, there is a servant of the householder come to receive the fruit of his vineyard.

Are not such messengers coming to us daily? And are we not daily rejecting them, some with mere indifference, others violently and with murderous hatred? Do we not slam the door in the face of many an opportunity and say to many a suggestion of duty, "Begone!"? Oh, yes; I think the lines in this part of the picture are coming out quite clearly.

What about that one who asked you to contribute a little of your spare money to a good cause? You snubbed him and sent him empty away, although you

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might have given it easily; and you know that you ought to have given it. What about the committee that requested you to take a thankless public office, and you refused with a contemptuous remark concerning the corruption of politics? You could have done much for the community had you been willing to undertake the work. What about that woman who asked you to use your influence against a great wrong which you might have helped to overcome? You told her that you were no more responsible than many others, and sent her away discouraged. All these and many others were servants of the householder, and you treated them shamefully.

The last resort is always *the Son*. To every one come these inferior messengers, and we treat them as we have seen. To every one also comes the Christ, at some time or other comes the perfect representative of the Father, comes with full authority and power.

The servants embody specific and partial requirements. They speak to us of special duties to be done, special opportunities to be improved. The Christ represents the completeness of duty, the perfection of service. Who responds to his demand renders the entire fruitage of the vineyard. The Christ stands for entire self-surrender to the will of God. That is the essence of his life. It is the pith of his gospel. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me," is his own declaration. And in the extreme test of the Gethsemane trial he cries, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

The same is the crucial test of discipleship, entire self-surrender to the will of God. We of to-day are no more willing to make such surrender than were the chief priests and elders of our Lord's day. Ready enough we are to make sacrifices, to endure persecutions, to undertake the most burdensome tasks and duties and to go on the most disagreeable missions, if in doing these we can only retain our self-will. We welcome penances, we

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delight in beneficence, we court martyrdom. But surrender our self-will? Never!

For this we slay the Son and cast him out, saying, "The inheritance shall be ours." We will save the world; we will work and strive; we will even make untold sacrifices for the elevation of men and for the relief of the suffering; we will give and toil and suffer; only let us do it in our own way; let us preserve our independence; let us be guided by our own wisdom and measured by our own standards. So even the Church many times becomes merely an instrument of human reforms and benevolences, instead of being an instrument in the hands of God for the accomplishment of his work. We often preach a gospel of worldly wisdom, and our prayers say in effect, "*My will, not thine*, be done."

In the parable of The Two Sons which immediately precedes the one we are studying, Jesus had brought out the great truth that righteousness is obedience to the will of God. Its design is to show the utter worthlessness of even the most pleasing life that is not fashioned by an honest effort to obey the commands of the heavenly Father.

In the present parable the thought is carried a step farther. Self-will is the essence of all sin, and leads to inevitable destruction. The parable concludes with the words, "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others." According to the evangelist Matthew, this answer to the Lord's question is spoken by his hearers; and that is most natural. Does not every reader pronounce the same judgment upon the husbandmen of the story? Furthermore, is not that the inevitable result of the conduct which the story represents? Just judgment is instinctive because it harmonizes with the universal laws of God. Self-will is inevitable self-destruction. Disobedience to the will of God works out its own penalty, first in loss of opportunity, and

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afterwards in loss of vital power. We are our own judges. Ourselves execute the law and inflict the penalty. Safety and progress are in complete and willing self-surrender to the will of God.

We turn back the pages of history, and read the story of Jewish rebellion and sin, and we wonder at the blind and wilful obstinacy of that ancient people. We readily persuade ourselves that they were peculiar in their perversity, and that the age of such blindness is long past. We are sure that no one would be guilty of like ingratitude and rebellion to-day. In point of fact, however, the lesson of this parable is no less pertinent to the American life of the twentieth century than to the Jewish life of our Lord's time and in the centuries preceding. The same spirit of self-will prevails now as then. Doubtless its outward manifestation has changed, is continually changing, but the spirit remains the same and works out the same fatal results.

It is a mere truism to say that the present is an exceedingly self-sufficient age. Never was a time when men felt greater confidence in their own ability to solve all great problems and to meet all emergencies, never a time when they were more impatient of control or subordination. To be sure, there is little positive atheism or outspoken ungodliness. The age is too intelligent for that. But our very Christianity is wanting in the spirit of obedience and self-surrender. We are Christians in belief and in outward forms of worship. But too often even our Christian standards are the expression of human wisdom rather than of the divine will. Too often we ask regarding any custom or course of conduct, What is expedient? or, What is popular? rather than, What is the teaching of Jesus Christ?

Modern systems of reform, modern standards of ethics, modern ideals of society and politics, are based chiefly upon various systems of unchristian philosophy. Men wise in their own conceits propound schemes of

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progress that seem to promise better things than the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Christian world goes wild over them. We are fond of talking about the problems of our time. There are the various social and financial problems, political problems, religious problems. How shall we solve them? Apply the principles of the gospel, and follow them wherever they may lead? To many that does not seem practical. The "Golden Rule," the Sermon on the Mount, these are looked upon as beautiful ideals for the pulpit and the prayer-meeting, but most of us do not think of them as practical laws for every-day living, for society and trade and legislation. So we work out laws and systems of our own on the lines of compromise, expediency, philosophy and what not. Result, disaster and confusion worse confounded.

To-day the Almighty is sending his messengers to the Christian people of America demanding the fruits of his vineyard. He is calling for fruits of godly citizenship, fruits of missionary endeavor, fruits of Christian statesmanship and leadership among the nations of the world. It is not enough that we lead the world in enlightenment and invention and wealth, not enough that we surpass all others in intellectual power and commercial greatness. What of the spiritual life of our people? What of our influence upon the millions who seek a refuge on our shores? What of the effort to spread the gospel of Christ and the kingdom of God among the nations of the earth? God rightly expects much in these directions from us. If we fail to fulfil his just requirements, shall it not be with us as with Israel of old? If we send our armies to civilize nations with the sword, if in a spirit of crass materialism we say, Trade follows the flag, and give ourselves up to conquest and expansion, instead of believing that trade and prosperity follow the Bible, is it not certain that we too shall be driven forth from the

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vineyard, and other husbandmen brought in who will deliver to the Lord the fruits in due season?

The parable is fraught with solemn and practical suggestion. If as a Christian people we heed its message, then shall we find our own growth and immortality secured through earnest consecration to the great work to which God has appointed us.

The Law of Spiritual Reaction

CHAPTER XXXII

The Law of Spiritual Reaction

THE TWO DEBTORS

Luke 7:36-50

Text.—“*Which of them therefore will love him most?*”—Luke 7:42

THE law of action and reaction is absolutely impartial. It is also universal. Our early studies in mechanics taught us that “Action and reaction are always precisely equal and opposite in direction”; but we thought of the law as applying only to material things and to physical forces. Wider observation discovers the same law working with no less certainty and effectiveness in the realms of mind and spirit. “A law of nature,” we say. Yes, and by the same token, a law of the kingdom of God.

The blacksmith with all the strength of his brawny arm brings down his hammer with a ringing blow upon the anvil. The anvil returns the blow with equal force upon the hammer. I hurl a stone into the air and the earth draws it downwards by the force of gravity. By the same force of gravity and with exactly equal strength the stone draws the earth towards itself. And these, that we call the observed facts of nature, are but types of what is going on in every sphere of life from the most grossly material to the most subtly spiritual.

A great preacher has spoken of “The profound responsiveness of life.” “How clear they are,” he says,

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"and how they call and answer each other—the world and man!" And he goes on to illustrate the wonderful adaptation and balance between human powers and faculties and the conditions by which man is surrounded, the challenge of mystery to mind, of hardship to strength, of difficulty to enthusiasm and earnestness of purpose.

Change the relation. Let it be not *the world* and man but *God* and man, and you still find the same responsiveness. There is the call of the divine Spirit and the response of the human soul. There is the aspiration of man's heart and the ready answer of God's love. Between these there is the same absolute equality, the same sure and perfect balance that we observe in the play of gravity.

In all the myriad phases of spiritual experience or the most subtle shadings of moral character you cannot find a solitary illustration of caprice or uncertainty. Theologians once delighted to speak of God as bestowing his favors not because of any conditions foreseen or observed in the recipient, but merely "for his own good pleasure." Modern intelligence has forever dethroned this deification of an Oriental tyrant and offers its worship only to a just and impartial Divinity who works in accordance with clearly defined laws and for assignable reasons. We have learned that law is diviner than license and certainty more godlike than caprice, and following out the truth thus suggested we are beginning to discover the fact that moral growth and spiritual experiences are always to be exactly measured by the real desire in the heart. On the one hand, God does not bestow his gifts unsought; and on the other, no faintest breath of true desire ever fails to reach the heavenly Father's ear or to receive an adequate reply.

We have been slow to grasp this message and to teach it to others; nevertheless it is the very message that Jesus published in the streets of Jerusalem and among the villages of Judea and Galilee. It is the essential truth that

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he has embodied in the parable of The Two Debtors. Let us see.

The parable is brief and unadorned, the simplest statement of facts. "A certain lender," says the Master, "had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he frankly forgave them both." There is the whole story. You see it is incomplete and, taken in itself, meaningless. We must have the setting if we are to get an interpretation. Put in the background and the story will glisten with truth. Here you have it.

A Pharisee named Simon invites Jesus to dine with him. He is more patronizing than polite, more curious than courteous; yet Jesus accepts his overture and welcomes the opportunity for religious conversation. As they recline at table not a few persons take the Oriental privilege of coming in, though uninvited, to stand or sit about the outer walls of the room and listen to the conversation of the distinguished company. Among these comes a woman who has borne an ill name in the city, and doubtless justly enough, but who has apparently repented of her life of sin and, touched by some former kindness of the Master, has forsaken her evil ways.

As a token of her gratitude she has brought a box of costly ointment with which to anoint her Saviour; but when she approaches the foot of his couch she is overwhelmed with emotion and bursts into tears, washing his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. Only then can she pour out upon him her rich and fragrant gift.

Simon is scandalized that such a person should enter his house, and yet more that Jesus should not at once perceive her character and scornfully reject her tribute of love. "This man if he were a prophet," says Simon to himself, "would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner."

Simon himself is no prophet, consequently he sees only

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what any man could see—the tokens of sin in the woman's countenance. Jesus sees more than he. He sees a sinner repentant, forgiven, redeemed. With more than a prophet's insight he sees the beginnings of a new and holy life where others can see naught but the foot-prints of evil. Not only so, but he also perceives the movement of Simon's mind. He hears the unspoken words. He catches the critical and contemptuous thought. And quietly he proceeds to expose and rebuke them.

First he utters the simple parable of The Two Debtors. Then he puts to Simon a direct question: "Which of the two will love his creditor most because of this forgiveness?" To this question Simon replies with more frankness than precision, "He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most." From the truth contained in this answer Jesus draws an inference regarding Simon and the woman. He marks the contrast between the less than scant politeness of the Pharisee and the humble and eager affection of the despised sinner. On the one hand, no water for his feet, no ointment for his head, no kiss of greeting as he entered; on the other, the bathing of his feet with tears and drying them with her hair, the anointing of feet rather than head indicating the profound humility of her spirit, and even the eager kiss repeated again and again in token of her love. What is the conclusion? What could it be but this?—"I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much."

Just a word regarding the last clause. Do not misunderstand the argument. Jesus does not here say, "She is forgiven *because* she loved much," but rather, if I rightly interpret his words, "I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven *as is indicated by* the greatness of her love." In other words, this excessive manifestation of her love is not the ground of her forgiveness, but it is the ground of his declaration, since one

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who had little sense of forgiveness would not manifest such great love.

Jesus then turns to the woman and reassures her with the declaration, "Thy sins are forgiven," and when those present express amazement he adds, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Not that the woman was not already conscious that she was forgiven, but that her consciousness needed confirmation in the presence of unbelief and scorn.

The application of this parable to Simon himself is unavoidable in view of our Lord's unfoldment of it. Since, by the Pharisee's own acknowledgment, love is proportioned to the sense of forgiveness, we may justly measure the sense of forgiveness by the revelation of love. Simon had manifested no love at all. His spirit had been that of condescending patronage. He had neglected the most common acts of courtesy. Clearly, therefore, he had no consciousness of either the need or the fact of forgiveness. By contrast, the overflowing love of this poor woman as clearly argued both the sense of need and the joyful consciousness of the fact.

In all that is said, no accusation of sin is made against Simon, nor is there any attempt to belittle the sinfulness of the woman. Jesus plainly declares to her the truth, "Thy sins, *which are many*," yet the Pharisee makes a poor showing in the light of the contrast, and he must have been extremely thick-skinned and self-satisfied if his conscience did not suggest to him the possibility that he too needed forgiveness. His life had been immeasurably more clean and pure and respectable than the life of this outcast, but it had been a loveless life. There had been nothing in his religion to stir the feelings and kindle the emotions, while she, out of the very depths of vile-ness, had been lifted to an ecstasy of joy and blessing. That was indeed a time for deep and thorough heart searching on the part of Simon.

Let us leave him to his task, while we ask, What has

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this compound parable for us?—"this compound parable," I say; for the incident taken as a whole is really a parable within a parable. The parable of Jesus is but one element in the larger parable of the gospel. True, the little story told by the Master is the kernel, but we must break through the shell before we can come at it. In other words, we must discover the bearing of the parable by taking it in connection with the incident as a whole.

In the larger parable we have the vivid contrast between a respected Pharisee and a despised and degraded woman. It is a contrast between respectability and shame. That is unquestionable. Simon flatters himself that it is equally a contrast between righteousness and sin; and Jesus does not directly dispute this assumption. On the contrary, he practically grants its truth for the sake of the deeper lesson which he desires to teach.

In the hypothetical case sketched in the parable there is a real contrast between two debtors, one of whom owes five hundred pence while the other owes but fifty, though both are insolvent and both are freely released from their indebtedness. It is as though Jesus had said, "Simon, I recognize the vast moral difference between yourself and this woman. Your life has been far more pure and pleasing than hers, and it may be that your debt to God on that score is less than hers; but God is ready to forgive you both with equal freedom. Now this woman's spirit and conduct indicate that she is already forgiven of God, though not of society, while your manner implies that you have neither sought nor received forgiveness."

Enough, then, of Simon and the outcast woman whom we are not concerned to identify, nor even to consider further. They have played their full part in the drama before us. Turn now to the wider scope of the story in its universal application. It is a parable of the relation of forgiveness and love, of the mutual responsiveness of

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God and man, of spiritual action and reaction. It unfolds a general law that has a vital bearing upon the spiritual life. Briefly that law may be stated thus:—

A man's love for God will invariably be commensurate with his sense of divine forgiveness.

Mark the words, "*his sense of forgiveness.*" I think you will agree with me that the difference between fifty and five hundred pence represents the sense of indebtedness rather than the exact and literal measure of indebtedness. Simon's reply to our Lord, though true enough for the occasion, was short-sighted and superficial; and I fancy that Jesus accepted it simply because it was sufficiently correct for his immediate purpose. A more thoughtful man would have taken into account not only the difference in the sums owed, but also the possible diversity in the men. A debt of fifty pence will weigh more heavily upon one man's mind than will a debt of five hundred pence upon another's. The feeling of gratitude and love will depend rather upon the moral pressure of the debt than upon its precise amount. He who feels his debt most sorely, whether the debt be great or small, will love most when forgiven.

As in the commercial so also in the spiritual realm, the sense of indebtedness is often wholly disproportioned to the amount of the debt. There are doubtless great differences of moral character among men. There are saints and sinners. There are good men and bad men. But many times, the difference is more in seeming than in reality. Much that passes for righteousness is mere respectability; and what we call sin is sometimes nothing more than a disregard of artificial social standards. St. Paul's declaration, "There is no difference, for all have sinned," has been wofully distorted and misapplied by many Christian workers and teachers; nevertheless it expresses a great truth. Notwithstanding the contrast of outward appearance, the Pharisee and the

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outcast are sometimes more closely allied in character than they think.

We are prone to compare ourselves with our fellows, and to estimate our comparative moral or spiritual indebtedness by the observed difference; a difference, by the way, that is invariably in our own favor. The readiness with which every man can discover others worse than himself is truly astounding. The Pharisee spirit is not confined to one class. It is not even limited to the respectable classes. The outcast, until touched by the power of divine love, will point the finger of scorn at some worse sinner.

It goes without saying that this habit of comparison always tends to belittle the sense of personal sin. He will not feel any heavy burden of moral debt, who is forever reminding himself that his neighbors owe more than he does. Consequently, multitudes who are recognized by the world at large as sinners and degraded outcasts, feel on their own part no pressure of indebtedness to God, nor any gratitude for the divine forgiveness.

On the other hand, some who have been canonized as saints by their fellow men have felt very deeply this sense of indebtedness to God. Listen to the apostle Paul, as he declares, even as he nears the end of his wonderful life of holiness and self-sacrifice, "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Hyperbole! exaggeration! you say. Not at all. It is but the honest expression of a profound sense of sinfulness that had grown in the mind and heart of that noble man through all the years of his service. As he became more perfectly acquainted with the character of Christ and the holiness of God, he realized ever more clearly how great were his own shortcomings, and he knew that it was no figure of speech but a literal truth, that, from his own point of view at least and in so far as concerned his own life, he was the chief of sinners.

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With the growth of this sense of personal sinfulness there was a corresponding growth of the sense of divine forgiveness, producing its reaction of love and devoted effort. So Paul, the chief of sinners, because he felt himself to be such, became the chief of apostles, the most fruitful worker in the primitive Church, the disciple of profoundest and most varied spiritual experience.

Always the spiritual life depends for its development upon this interplay of spiritual reactions. Growing out of a clear sense of sin is the desire for forgiveness. The reaction of the desire is the glad consciousness that God does forgive our sins; and this consciousness in its turn calls forth the response of love and gratitude from the soul. Love expressing itself in service and sacrifice is answered by further enduements of grace, and thus the process continues without end.

Doubtless there have been individual instances—yes, more, there have been distinct periods in the history of the Christian Church—when the sense of sin has been emphasized in an artificial manner and to an unreasonable degree, and the results have not been the best. As might be expected, such ideals have given rise to a morbid and unreal piety and to spiritual experiences, so called, that have been of more than doubtful value.

Such, however, is not the danger of the present era. On the contrary, we are now living in one of those periods when the common Christian life is rendered shallow because of our trifling and inadequate notions of sin. We have come to look at evil so largely from a scientific standpoint, we have talked so long and so persistently about environment and heredity, that the moral aspect of the matter is often overlooked. In fact, we are not half sure that evil is really evil at all. Perhaps it is only "good in the making." The natural history of evil, the social and other problems to which it gives rise, its physiology and psychology we understand quite clearly; but of evil as sin against God, as a grievous debt to be for-

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given, blotted out by the power of the divine Saviour—of that we know little.

What wonder, then, if the religion of to-day is shorn of deep spiritual experience? What wonder if the sense of forgiveness is rare, and love to God is weak? The process is simple and inevitable. Who fails to apprehend the reality of sin cares little about forgiveness, and to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

The parable makes its direct appeal to every soul. It is "deep calling unto deep," the deep things of God calling unto the deep and earnest thought of his child, a challenge to thoroughness and care in the cultivation of the spiritual life.

Would you know the possibilities of the Christian experience, the greatness of Christian joy and freedom? You must first realize your sin and need of forgiveness. Cease to compare your life with the lives of others about you, and bring it fearlessly under the searching light of divine truth. Study the perfect life of the Christ. Let that life be the one standard of measurement and comparison. Let the glory and the radiance of Calvary's cross stream upon it. And when, in the clear light of divinest love, you have caught a glimpse of your measureless indebtedness to God, you will throw yourself in humility and self-condemnation at his feet, confessing yourself the chief of sinners, and there will flow into your soul a tide of peace and joy and love hitherto unknown.

Neighborhood

CHAPTER XXXIII

Neighborhood

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:30-37

Text.—“*Who is my neighbor?*”—Luke 10:29

SOME questions are best answered when they are not answered at all. Some questions can only be so answered. The very attempt to answer them is suicidal. It is like the effort to measure love, or to discover the essence of life by dissection. The process of measurement or investigation itself destroys its object just as we are about to grasp it.

Do you sometimes wonder why Jesus evaded certain questions that were put to him in all earnestness and sincerity? It was that by evasion he might make very clear the truth that a direct answer or attempted answer would obscure. Take one or two illustrations.

Disciples ask, “Lord, are there few that be saved?” What says the Master? “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” That was not an answer. It was an evasion. Do not say, however, that the words were a mere reproof of unjustifiable curiosity. Not at all. Though an evasion, the words contain the kernel of the answer, the only truthful answer. Think a moment.

The number of the saved depends upon the number and earnestness of those who strive for salvation. It is not a fixed number arbitrarily determined by “the

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counsel and foreknowledge of God," as the theologians of a former age would say. The divine provision is limitless, universal. The only limit possible is that which men set for themselves. Do you not see, therefore, that if Jesus had said, "Yes, the saved are few," his hearers might have been discouraged and so failed to put themselves among the number of the saved? On the other hand, had he said, "Oh, the saved are numberless," they might have become careless and so have neglected their opportunity to swell the number. It is indeed a strange paradox that the proclamation of certain truths seems to endanger their truthfulness. The chief hindrance to many a man's salvation to-day is his fixed belief that everybody will be saved.

At another time Peter, with a sidelong glance at John, asks, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" A very natural question and not wholly impertinent or meddling. Yet the Master replies, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Another evasion. What is its purpose? This, is it not? To call Peter's attention to the fact that the answer to his question is involved in his own action. John's work is not independent of Peter's. His best achievement is conditioned on his fellow disciple's faithfulness. If Peter does not follow the Master, he may mislead John or utterly frustrate his work. What this man shall do, then, will be determined in no small degree by what he himself shall do to help or to hinder him.

In the case directly before us, a lawyer comes to Jesus with the great test question of the gospel, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It is a vital question, and receives a direct and unequivocal answer. The lawyer is referred back to his own most familiar field of life and thought, the law. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" With ready familiarity the questioner sums up the whole in two commands, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with

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all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Taking him on this familiar ground, Jesus gives a direct and complete answer, "This do, and thou shalt live."

Like many another enquirer, however, the lawyer is more ready to propound problems than to solve them, more eager to talk than to act, to speculate than to sacrifice. His question is answered. Is he satisfied? Does he at once go forth to carry out in his life the principle so simply and clearly announced? No. The answer to one question only calls forth another: "And who is my neighbor?"

To this question no answer is given. When a man makes one question the stepping-stone to another question, it is time to call a halt. It is a waste of breath to answer him, even though he fancies himself to be a model of eagerness and candor. Too often he is one of those persons who have been described as "ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." Honest doubt merits respect; yet there is always the danger that its respect may petrify into self-worship. Hence it is well not to give it too much attention.

But this does not altogether explain Jesus' evasion. There is a second reason more vital than this. The fact is, no direct answer could be given to the lawyer's question that would not in some sense belie itself. "Who is my neighbor?" As well ask, How many persons make a crowd? How much food will satisfy hunger? How much money constitutes wealth? or any similar question. The query betrays a wholly false conception of the entire subject, which a direct answer would only perpetuate. Jesus, therefore, does not attempt to answer the question, but tells a story instead. And the story, by its very evasion of the question, flashes out the truth that no answer could have conveyed.

We call the story The Parable of the Good Samaritan. We have all of us read it hundreds of times.

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Let us read it once more that it may speak its message afresh.

Under the impact of our thought the parable falls into three sections. It is a drama in three acts. Let us designate them for convenience, a. *Need*. b. *Nearness*. c. *Neighborhood*.

The first act or scene presents a *picture of Need*. "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead."

A picture of need, I say. Here is a man penniless, helpless, and well-nigh hopeless. His need is extreme. Now need is not neighborhood, but it is a common, perhaps an essential element of it. Need is the basis, the challenge, the inspiration of neighborhood. Where there is no need the neighborly spirit may exist, but it must of necessity be latent. It lacks all opportunity for exercise, for manifestation. Need, then, is the gateway to neighborhood. It stands at the opening of the parable, and through it we must pass to the second scene.

Here our key-word is "*Nearness*." The traveler lies stunned and bleeding by the wayside. "And by chance a certain priest was going down that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion."

Nearness is predicated of three men in this scene, but only one of them realizes the meaning of neighborliness. What is the suggestion? Clearly this: Nearness does not in itself constitute neighborhood, although it may be a second element that makes for neighborhood. We often use the term "neighborhood" as meaning a cluster of families or persons in a small territory. That is a mistake. Such a cluster is a vicinity or ward; yet there may be no neighborhood there. Draw your line never

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so closely. Let it include but two persons living side by side; still there may be no neighborhood. There surely is none if in these two there is no spirit of mutual interest and care and helpfulness, no desire to minister to one another's needs.

In our large cities a number of families and individuals often dwell under the same roof, separated from each other by thin partition walls, who yet know no more of one another and care no more for one another than as though they lived on opposite sides of the globe. Each lives his own life and goes his own way, priding himself perhaps that he never meddles with the affairs of others. There is nearness, but not neighborhood.

On the other hand, a Miss Stone is captured by brigands in Turkey, and immediately hundreds of anxious souls in far-off America exert themselves for her rescue, though many of them have never seen her or even heard of her before. The people of Cuba are oppressed by a cruel master, and quickly a nation from across the water appears with armies to succor them. There is neighborhood without geographical nearness.

I do not find in the construction of this parable any intentional detraction of either priest or Levite as the representative of his class, nor any purpose to laud the Samaritans as a people in contrast with the Jews. The characters or actors are chosen simply for the sake of contrast, and this contrast is not a contrast between men but between certain circumstances and elements which these men embody and which bear directly upon this notion of nearness as a test of neighborhood. Priest and Levite represent in themselves all that is commonly associated with the idea of neighborhood. They were near ones in every sense. They were fellow countrymen of the distressed traveler. Their nearness was both geographical and racial. Add to this their position in the community as the recognized custodians of the public welfare, leaders in religious benevolence and charity,

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who would be expected to feel some sense of responsibility and to discern most quickly and clearly the neighborly obligation. The Samaritan, on the other hand, is remote from whatever point of view you look at him. His nationality obliterates all geographical and racial obligations of neighborliness to the Jew. The men were at the opposite poles and celestial diameters lay between them. Yet the sight of distress kindles the neighborly spirit in spite of this fact. Can we escape the truth that flashes from this part of the story? Listen to its message.

Neighborhood is not a matter of geography, but of humanity. It is not a question of affinity, but of opportunity. You cannot draw lines on the surface of the globe and say, "Thus far and no farther does my neighborly duty extend." Such lines, though they encircle the earth, utterly strangle the neighborly spirit. You cannot separate the race by cleavage planes, however comprehensive, without sundering the neighborly spirit at some vital point.

Need and nearness together fail to define neighborhood or to impress its obligation upon souls that are not neighborly. They steel themselves against the cry and pass by on the other side. But to the neighborly soul they present an irresistible appeal. Seen through the eyes of the Samaritan they are the gateways to a neighborhood that is truly divine.

Turn now to the third scene in the parable, which completes its lesson. Here we have no definition, it is true, but instead thereof we have a living picture of "*Neighborhood.*" Note the careful detail, the cumulative description of the spirit of neighborhood.

The picture reveals eight distinct elements, like the colors of the prism, which taken together compose the white light of neighborhood. They are,—1. *Sympathy.* "When he (the Samaritan) saw him, he was moved with compassion." 2. *Approach.* "And came to him." 3.

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Contact. "And bound up his wounds." 4. *Ministration.* "Pouring in oil and wine." 5. *Self-sacrifice.* "And set him on his own beast." (He had to walk himself, you see.) 6. *Hospitality.* "Brought him to an inn." (His own home was too far away to take him there; hence this act was equivalent to receiving him under his own roof.) 7. *Care.* "And took care of him." 8. *Provision.* "And on the morrow . . . he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Why all this fulness of detail? Why did Jesus not content himself with saying, "A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was and when he saw him, he rescued and befriended him"? That would have told the story so far as the vital facts were concerned, but it would not have given us the vivid picture of neighborhood. Neighborhood is generous, large-hearted, free-handed. The neighborly spirit never counts the cost, never measures duty, never leaves its work incomplete. It is abundant, overflowing, ample.

Here, too, the thought is clear as crystal. Neighborhood is not in being, but in doing; not in seeing, but in feeling and fellowship. Abstract neighbors, that is, neighbors by nature and by virtue of locality, there are none. Need and nearness are transmuted into neighborhood only by the alchemy of compassion and beneficence.

Now gather up the three scenes into one complete picture, and what does it teach us? This first: We define neighborhood as an area; Jesus defines it as a spirit. We make it a limit of responsibility; he makes it an unlimited opportunity. Where sympathy and compassion go out eagerly in response to need, there and there only is neighborhood.

In the second place, neighbors are made, not born. Every man may have just as many neighbors as he

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chooses to make, no more, no less. He can have none else. More than once have we heard the complaint, "I have no neighbors!" Sometimes this is true; but whose is the fault? Invariably it is the fault of the complaining one. He has no neighbors because he has made none. Who would have neighbors must show himself neighborly. Perhaps the Samaritan of the parable never had a neighbor before. He certainly had one after his act of kindness. So any man who feels lonely and neighborless can speedily have as many neighbors as he wishes; but he must go out and make them.

Neighbors are easily made, and the manufacture does not require any particular kind or quality of timber. In fact, the poorer the timber the better the work that can be done. The half dead Jew by the roadside was not a hopeful subject for the Samaritan's effort, but he succeeded so well with his task that he has been held up before the world for two thousand years as the model neighbor maker. There are numberless crooked sticks in every community, moral derelicts, social wrecks, not to speak of the many needy ones and distressed. Every one of these offers himself to the man in quest of neighbors. Each utters his separate challenge to the neighborly spirit.

One more truth the story suggests. The question, "Who is my neighbor?" is suicidal. It betrays the unneighborly spirit. It aggravates the unneighborly spirit. The truly neighborly soul will never stay to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" Such souls are too busy seizing every opportunity to manifest the neighborly spirit, to perform some neighborly kindness.

This is a point to be remembered by every reader of the parable. Whenever you find yourself asking, "Who is my neighbor?" you may be sure that something is wrong in your own heart. You are lacking in the true spirit of neighborliness, or you are falling from the grace of neighborliness. What you need is not information,

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but transformation; not to discover the limit of your duty, but to be filled with the spirit of love that knows no limit.

Note also the fact that while the spirit of neighborhood is *often* reciprocal, it never waits for that. The Samaritan did not enter into a covenant with the wounded Jew for mutual defense or helpfulness. The Jew was too nearly dead for any such compact. The chances were even that he would not recover. The neighborliness was all on one side and looked for no return even in gratitude. The neighborhood that seeks a return is not the neighborhood of the Good Samaritan.

That is a mistaken interpretation which makes this parable the basis of various fraternal organizations, and sees in these the fulfilment of its spirit. Such organizations insist upon mutual obligation. Reciprocity of helpfulness is their key-note. Their members say to one another in effect, "I will help you in time of need if you will help me. I will help you *because* you help me." Now these organizations doubtless accomplish a great deal of good in the world, and relieve many cases of need, but they are in no true sense the successors or representatives in our time of the Good Samaritan. They are not the exponents of real neighborhood. The kindness that conditions itself upon a return in kind is not neighborhood, for that is wholly unselfish. Neighborhood gives with no thought or hope of receiving, gives freely, gives lavishly, its one concern being to meet the need and to meet it amply. If it brings any return, the return is as spontaneous and as unconditioned as is the kindness itself.

✓ The world needs more neighbors. It can never have too many. We can well spare multitudes of men and women who are forever asking questions, mooning over social problems, searching for the boundary lines of responsibility and duty. But the men and women who do things, kind things, neighborly things, regardless of

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boundaries and claims, we can never have enough of them. And this is the Christly ideal,—not “Go thou and investigate or measure or study,” but “Go thou and do.” Go and make neighbors, make them anywhere, make them everywhere and always.

Who is my neighbor? The question never has been answered, never can be answered. It must ever recoil upon the soul that asks it, an endless interrogative. But go forth and find some needy soul, bring yourself near to such a one, give yourself to him generously, ungrudgingly, in sympathy and self-sacrifice and helpfulness, and into your soul shall shine with all the glory of a divine revelation the meaning of that word, *Neighborhood*.

God's Fool

CHAPTER XXXIV

God's Fool

THE RICH HUSBANDMAN

Luke 12:16-21

Text.—“*God said unto him, Thou fool.*”—Luke 12:20

JESUS has sketched for us a portrait of God's fool. These are his essential features:—“He layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” All else is incidental. You may change the other features as you will. You may read into them all possible beauty and grace, but these remain, like the flattened skull and the lusterless eye, the invariable tokens of spiritual idiocy.

I think we often read this story in such a way that we altogether miss its real meaning. We magnify the details till they overshadow the application. And we are somewhat startled to find ourselves admiring or pitying the rich landowner instead of condemning him. True, we have called him a fool for ages—this man of the parable—but have we not often thought of him as unfortunate rather than foolish? Has he not many times seemed to us a really wise and worthy man who was the helpless victim of capricious Omnipotence? He had made ready for years of rational and well-earned enjoyment, and God cut him off in a day. We have written the words, “THIS NIGHT” in large capitals, and have pitied the poor fellow because of them.

Still, we have consented, out of respect to the recog-

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nized judgment and authority of Jesus, to call the straw man a fool, while we have taken the liberty to call his living counterpart a wise man and to make him our model in action, hoping that God may be more kind to us than to him. We have thought that if we could only blot out that sentence, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee," we should thus transform arrant folly into profoundest wisdom and make over our Lord's red light of warning into a guiding star of truest Christian economy.

Now look at the portrait a moment candidly and say, Does it not bear a marked resemblance to *our wise man*? Is not this fool of God the veritable twin brother to the world's sage or oracle? Is he not the man whom we consult in all financial matters? the man whom we delight to honor and to praise and to imitate? Is not his standard of life even higher than the average in this Christian land? Notice a few points.

(a) In the first place, *his wealth has been honestly acquired*. There is no hint of injustice or wrong-doing in the story. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully." He was a farmer. He was a producer of wealth. He had not become rich by means of speculation or oppression or dishonesty. He had not taken his wealth from the pockets of others by robbery, legal or illegal. No one had been made poorer by his increasing riches. On the contrary, the whole community was benefited. His broad acres required many hands for their culture, and his wealth was the storehouse from which many workers drew their wages, many families their living. With increasing prosperity he gave employment to an ever-increasing number of persons, and so the community rejoiced in his acquisition and looked upon him as a great patron of industry, one of the few who enrich the world with every enrichment of themselves.

(b) In the second place, *he was thoughtful and far-*

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sighted. He prepared in time for emergencies. "He thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" Anything unwise in that? Was it not proof of the truest wisdom and prudence to make timely preparation for the coming harvest? A foolish man indeed would he be who should wait till the harvest time was upon him before acting, and then permit valuable crops to go to waste for want of storage.

(c) Yet again, *he was practical as well as thoughtful.* No sooner did he realize the need than he set himself to provide for it. With him to think was to act. "He said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." Now do not fly off at a tangent and say that he did wrong in this, that it was selfish and wicked for him to heap up such wealth; for that is what we are all of us trying to do, and any such application of the parable recoils with deadly force. We must always be careful lest the arrow we aim at another hit ourselves, lest our supposed dart prove itself to be a boomerang.

Remember, too, that this man was not planning to hoard up his grain, as a miser hoards his gold, with no intention of using it. He was not holding it as godless speculators hold corners in wheat and corn and flour, permitting their poorer neighbors to starve if need be in order that they may themselves wring a few more dollars from the public necessity. No! he was only making reasonable provision for his own future needs. He was preparing to retire from active life and from the great field of competition that he might give himself up to the enjoyment of his possessions. For years he had toiled and struggled, he had denied himself many a luxury, he had refused every invitation to take a holiday, and his wealth was the result of his toil. Now he will take a rest. Now he will enjoy that which his labor has won.

(d) More than all, *he was not excessively greedy.*

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Having secured enough for his own needs, he was willing to retire and give place to others. "I will say to my soul, Soul, take thine ease." His is not the miserly, grasping spirit that will not cease working and striving so long as anything remains to be gathered. He does not propose to go on hoarding all his days. According to a reasonable estimate he has wealth sufficient to ensure him a comfortable living for the remainder of his time. Now he will turn over his farm with its resources and opportunities into the hands of others and let them become as wealthy as himself. In these days, when few men are willing to rest in their eager pursuit of wealth so long as any gleanings remain and they have the power to strive for them, this man is a model of unselfishness and moderation.

Yes, I repeat the thought, this is a truthful portrait of the man whom we, the disciples of to-day, call wise, kind-hearted, thrifty, and even benevolent. We praise him; we honor him, and in some feeble and hesitating way we imitate him, and flatter ourselves that the measure of our imitation is also the measure of our wisdom and even of our Christianity.

But God says now, as he said then, "Thou fool!" He has not changed his opinion by so much as a single iota in two thousand years. The man of the parable was a fool in the sight of God. His imitator of yesterday was a fool by the same judgment. Why? Because he made such careful provision for his bodily wants? No. Because he provided for many years when he was to live but one day? No. He could not know that his time was to be so brief. He did right to provide for many years. He was wise to secure himself against material want for the time which would probably be his. There was no folly in this. There was every probability that he would live for many years, and he was wise to prepare for that. But while that was only a *probability*, there was the *positive certainty* that his soul

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would live through all eternity, and he was a thriftless fool to make no provision for that. Wise to provide against the possible; fool to neglect the certain. Wise to foresee and supply the needs of the body; fool to imagine that the soul could be fed with corn and wheat. Wise in what he had done; fool because of what he had not done.

Note his words, "*Soul*, thou hast much goods laid up." Where had he laid up anything for his soul? Can the soul's goods be stored in barns or deposited in banks or represented in stocks and bonds? No. His well-filled barns might satisfy all bodily wants for many years. He might live in the utmost comfort for a long time. He might eat, drink, and be merry for half a century; and yet, with all his plenty, his soul might be eternally starved. In the midst of this abundance his *life* might be miserably pinched and unsatisfied. Many a soul has perished with hunger while the body was oppressed with luxury. Many a comfortable home, yes, many a costly palace, is the abode of hearts that are filled with longings persistent but unsatisfied.

How often, too, does it happen that the attainment of one's ambition strikes the death-knell to the spirit of activity and satisfaction! With the retirement from labor and struggle, life loses all zest and meaning, and it is impossible for the restless one to eat, drink and be merry as he had fondly hoped.

This, then, is his folly; this is the point of censure; not that he was miserly; for he was not; not that he was selfish in the ordinary sense; for that does not appear; not that he claimed in any undue measure the ownership of his riches; for no emphasis is laid upon that; but that his provision was too small, his foresight too limited. "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" Thou art prepared for the probable; art thou prepared for the inevitable? Thou hast much goods laid up for

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many years; hast thou anything laid up for eternity? or shall all thy wealth pass into other hands while thy soul goes forth empty, naked and starving? Foolish one! Thy body has seemed of greater importance to thee than thy soul. Thou hast thought more of many years than of eternity.

Study the phrases in which Jesus sets forth his folly:—

(a) He prefaces the parable with the statement that "*Life consisteth not in the abundance of things.*" All the material wealth of the world cannot insure a moment of life. It cannot bribe a soul to delay its departure a single day. It cannot even transform the continued existence of years into anything worthy the name of life. In the midst of plenty there may be disappointment, sorrow, pain, misery, that the largest wealth cannot alleviate. Life may become stunted, dwarfed, in the very process of wealth-winning. It will surely become so if we permit ourselves to imagine that things are more important than life. Life, life, that is the important thing, the only important thing. Life is not mere continued existence. It is growth; it is progress; it is capacity to enjoy or to suffer. And material riches are of value only as they minister to that.

(b) A single sentence pricks the bubble of this man's hope. "*This night thy soul shall be required of thee.*" A startling announcement, truly, yet its force is not altogether dependent upon the words "This night." Those words merely put in the present tense what would have been no less startling a score of years later. Whether now or then the soul would go out in poverty. There were no spiritual riches which it might enjoy either in this world or the next. Had earthly existence been continued for a thousand years there would have been no life. The shriveled soul could do nothing but vegetate or petrify. No provision had been made for its growth or enjoyment. There were only things, things, things, and life consisteth not in things.

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How differently the same announcement affects one who has really provided for life. Hear St. Paul exclaiming, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness." He was rich towards God, and it mattered not to him whether he remained to enjoy those riches in the circles where they had been won, or went to reap their fruits in another sphere. In either realm they were of permanent value. The gallant Wolfe felt it no hardship to be called home, in the very moment of his triumph on the plains of Abraham. By his heroism that day he had gained something more than things. His riches were not such as he must leave to another, and he could exclaim, "I die happy." There are riches that are not lost or in any way qualified by the mere change of scene from this world to the next.

(c) How pertinent is the question, "*Whose shall those THINGS be, which thou hast provided?*" That is the sharpest sting in the punishment of him who lays up treasure for himself alone. It must some time slip into other hands, and often into the hands of those least pleasing to him. How many a fortune has been amassed by untold thrift and economy, only to fall into the hands of some idle spendthrift to be scattered to the winds. A common folly of the present day is the practise of gathering property during a lifetime with the purpose of leaving it to noble objects by bequest. But the summons of God does not always await the completing of wills. And when it does so, the benevolent intention is many times frustrated by legal miscarriages or swallowed up in the wrangling of attorneys, and so the divine account book shows in place of a large balance of "riches towards God," only a blank page inscribed with the words, "Thou foolish one!"

(d) The whole significance of the parable is gathered up and put into the one closing sentence, "*So is*

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he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Foolish, it is, to lay up treasure for oneself, to provide against the needs of declining years? Not always. But it is always unspeakably foolish not to be rich towards God. Here is the emphatic thought. This parable is not a denunciation of wealth or of genuine thrift. It is rather a plea for greater thrift, a warning against the danger of spiritual poverty. It calls for a larger outlook, for more extended foresight. It says to us, "Provide not only for the needs of time, but for those of eternity as well. Prepare not alone for the probable, but for the inevitable. Let your acquisition be for the soul—i. e., for the life itself—as well as for the body which is but a temporary abode of the life."

There is no necessary antagonism between material and spiritual riches. Jesus never indulged in sweeping and unqualified denunciations of wealth. To them that truly love God, money, even though it be counted by the thousands and millions of dollars, will at last appear to be one of the "all things" that work together for good. Thrift in religion does not imply thriftlessness or failure in business. Heavenly wisdom is not synonymous with earthly folly. No one ever more truly and wisely stimulated the spirit of economy and thrift than Jesus. Yet he always made material enrichment subordinate to the infinitely more vital interests of the soul. "Seek first the kingdom of God," was his changeless command, but he followed it with the words, "All these things shall be added unto you."

Earthly treasure rightly used may help us to gain the heavenly riches. Life consisteth not in things, but things may become the instruments for enlarging life. We may lay up treasure for ourselves to a certain extent, at least, and at the same time be rich towards God. The two may go hand in hand, or they may not. If at any time we must choose between them, blessed is he who lets go the earthly and prefers to be rich towards God.

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He who has learned to exchange the earthly coin at par value for the riches of the heavenly kingdom is doubly blessed.

There are investments of money that make us rich, not for a brief period, but for eternity. Look at Dr. Pearsons of Chicago, making money simply that he may invest it in struggling schools and colleges and other benevolent institutions, so helping numberless young men and women to a larger and more useful life. Every dollar he accumulates adds to his own present soul life, and it matters not when he may be called to give up his earthly existence; his wealth will go on bearing fruit for his own spiritual enrichment. All down through the coming ages those who have been partakers of the gifts which he has given and all other lives that have been made larger or better through their influence will go to the increase of his soul's inheritance. They shall be his and not another's.

Whoever uses his wealth, whether great or small, to make homes brighter, to make hearts happier, to make lives better, is investing not for time but for eternity.

Centuries ago a woman in extreme poverty, out of overflowing love to God gave two mites to the service of his kingdom. I know not for what purpose they were used. Doubtless not as helpfully as they might be employed in these days of practical benevolence; but they were devoted to God in the only manner possible for her. Through all the succeeding generations those mites have been bearing interest. In every age men have said as they have poured their gifts into the Lord's treasury, whether for religious or philanthropic purposes, "I will give my mite"; and whenever that word has been earnestly spoken, testifying that the poor woman's little gift has been the primary inspiration of the greater offering, the latter has been put down to the credit of the widow in the book of life, being reckoned as interest

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on her original investment. To-day no man can compute the wealth that is hers. She is one of heaven's multi-millionaires, and her wealth has not yet reached its limit. That is the sort of property that men can carry with them to the next world.

If adaptation be the token of life, then surely this parable is a part of God's *living word*; for it fits with marvelous exactness into the present state of human thought and activity. It finds a most perfect illustration in the methods and ideals of modern society. This is a covetous age. I do not mean by that an age of hard and grasping miserliness. We are too intelligent, too refined, too polite to imitate the rude frankness of the man who interrupted a sermon with the selfish request, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Ours is the more delicate and therefore the more dangerous covetousness of the parable. Our aims and ideals are exceedingly material. We are thrifty, we are diligent, we are careful for the future (i. e., for "many years"), but our whole thought and energy are bent towards the acquisition of *things*. Money, food, clothing, home comforts, luxuries, education and enjoyments, all these we labor for. And we think that these constitute *life*. So with all our wealth and opportunity and resources we are in danger of soul starvation and eternal disappointment.

Yet it need not be so. If we are not rich towards God the folly is in us, not in our circumstances. Never was such an opportunity for spiritual wealth as we of the present day enjoy. Openings for spiritual investment present themselves on every hand. We may find them at our very doors. This is preeminently the age of philanthropic and missionary enterprise. It is the privilege of every man in our day and land to link himself with the growth of life and character about him, to have some share in the uplifting of his own community or in the larger spiritual advancement of the race. We

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may transmute things into life, wealth into character, by means of the alchemy of unselfishness and consecration; and, so doing, ours shall no longer be the curse of folly, but to us shall be spoken that other word,—

“They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Preparation for the Coming
of the Son of Man

CHAPTER XXXV

Preparation for the Coming of the Son of Man

THE HOUSEHOLDER AND THE THIEF

Luke 12: 35-48; Matt. 24: 42-51

Text.—“*Be ye also ready.*”—Luke 12: 40

THE coming of the Son of man” is a topic frequently recurring in the later days of our Lord’s ministry. Again and again he assures his disciples that he is about to leave them for a time, but that he will return to consummate the work which he has now just begun. The manner, the place, and the time of his return he leaves wholly indeterminate. More than this, he plainly declares that they will not and cannot be known beforehand, but exhorts every disciple to “watch” and “be ready” for the event whenever it may occur. In every utterance upon the subject the element of unexpectedness is made very emphatic. Whatever else the coming of the Son of man may signify, it certainly represents the supreme crisis or emergency of human life. and this emergency touches life at various angles.

The parable of The Ten Virgins, for example, is a picture of the relation of this crisis to character, while the parable of The Householder and The Thief with its accompanying semi-parable of The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants depicts the relation of the crisis to conduct. The crisis is ever the test of character. but the preparation for the crisis is in conduct. “If the master

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of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched." In other words, he would have prepared for the special emergency by his own activity.

Few expositors include this sketch in their catalogue of our Lord's parables. Some have treated the subordinate picture which I have called the "semi-parable" as the central theme. Clearly, the entire discourse is too closely connected to admit of division, but to my mind the picture of the householder and thief is the kernel. That is the true parable, of which the rest is an explanation. The key-note of the entire passage is preparedness for the great emergency. The householder speaks of the necessity of being always ready, and the two servants illustrate the nature of the preparation required. The declaration that the householder would have *watched*, might, if left thus, encourage the notion of mere idle waiting for the Lord's advent. It was therefore necessary to add the further parabolic explanation to show that watching implied activity, faithfulness, service. Not a mere state of passive expectation, however eager and believing, is the true preparation for the coming of the Lord, but active effort, obedience to his commands, devotion to his service.

"Conduct," says Matthew Arnold, "is seven-eighths of life." While we may question the exactness of his proportions, yet from the point of view of our parable the utterance voices a profound truth. Conduct is to the remainder of life as the apple or the pear or the orange to the tree upon which it grows. To be sure you must have the right kind of a tree to produce the desired fruit. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or pears from a scrub-oak, nor will a stunted and ill-conditioned tree produce large quantities of fine fruit; but, after all, it is the fruit that is of paramount importance. At least seven-eighths of the value of an orchard or of an orange grove is represented by its fruit. For

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wood or shade-trees neither would be worth cultivating. The fruit-grower does not boast of the height or beauty or symmetry of his trees. He does not talk of the comfort to be enjoyed by resting under their shade. No; he shows you his pears, his peaches, his oranges, and tells you they are the best in the market. When the nurseryman tries to sell a particular variety of fruit tree, he says little or nothing about the tree itself, but he does speak of the fruit, of its size, its flavor, its abundance, its superiority to all other varieties. In buying you will choose the most ungainly trees if they produce the best fruit. Whoever should do otherwise must be wanting the most ordinary common sense.

"He shall be like a tree," said David. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said Jesus. There you have it. Human life is a tree and conduct is its fruit. It is by conduct that we gage the value of manhood. Not what a man *is*, but what he *does*, is the supreme question. But you say, "Conduct depends upon character. What a man is determines what he does." True, unquestionably true. Character is the root, the trunk, the branch; yet these all find their meaning, their value in the fruit, which is conduct.

When we study the life history of a great man, the first question we ask about him is, "What did he do?" And we trace his character, his environment, his heredity, only when his deeds make such an investigation worth while. If a man has *done* nothing worthy of consideration, we seldom trouble ourselves to ask who or what he *was*. The true heroes of history are the men of noble action, of heroic conduct. Beside them the men of negative or latent power are insignificant.

Witness, two prominent figures of the Reformation period, Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus was a man of broader mind, profounder scholarship, more progressive thought, and more pleasing manners than Luther, but his learning and culture did not inspire him to earnest

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and self-sacrificing action, hence his name is forgotten by the multitudes. The tree was graceful and attractive in appearance, but it bore no valuable fruit to feed the life of the race. Luther on the other hand, albeit somewhat rude and uncouth in manner, was a man of action, fearless, devoted action. The crooked and storm-torn tree bore abundance of rich fruit. It was for this that the name of Martin Luther has become a household word throughout Protestant Christendom.

Again, note the contrast between a Chesterfield and a Cromwell. On the one hand, Lord Chesterfield, distinguished by brilliancy of wit, polished grace of manner, elegance of conversation, "a wit among lords and a lord among wits," the companion of famous men and himself most famous of all for his urbanity, has won little regard from the majority of his fellow men, because his gifted life bore no worthy fruit of noble action. On the other hand, plain Oliver Cromwell manifested nothing of grace or beauty in his life. As was said of a greater than Cromwell, "He had no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." A rough character produced by a rough time. Yet the judgment of history and the verdict of public opinion has awarded him a high place and honor; for his was a life of action. Whatever he was, he did great things and good things for men. He gave a great impetus to the cause of human liberty, and not the government of Great Britain alone, but all government has been milder and more just because of him. Therefore men admire and praise him.

Over against the saying of Matthew Arnold we may put that other saying of Carlyle: "The end of life is an action, not a thought, though it were the noblest."

And this is precisely the truth that Jesus would have us discover in the parable before us. The whole force and meaning of his explanation is concentrated in those words, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he

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cometh shall find *so doing*." The contrast which he draws is a contrast of action, of conduct. Could his meaning be more clear or unmistakable? Not what one believes or knows or desires, not even what one *is*, is the supreme test; but what one *does*.

In the direct discourse that follows this series of parables, our Lord returns to this truth and makes it yet more emphatic. As he paints a vivid picture of the final separation between the righteous and the wicked, he makes conduct the ultimate ground of the judgment pronounced upon each. To those on the one side he says, "Inasmuch as *ye did it*"—i. e., did that which was noble and true and kind—"Come." And to those on the left hand, "Since *ye did it not*, therefore depart." Does he then undervalue character and consecration? Not by any means. But he sees in conduct their necessary fruition, and tests both by that. If conduct, justly estimated, be evil, then it follows of necessity that the character is worthless and the consecration a sham.

One asked of Demosthenes, so goes the story, "What is the first quality of a great orator?" Demosthenes replied, "Action." "What is the second quality?" Again he answered, "Action." "What the third?" "Action." There you have another witness to the truth we are insisting upon. Action, conduct, is the supreme test of the great orator. It is the test of worth or greatness in any field. What is the first, the second, the third attribute of the successful teacher? Action. What are the marks of a great legislator? Action. What are the proofs of courage in the soldier, of skill in the physician, of commercial ability in the merchant, of trustworthiness in the servant? Action, action, action. By the same token the prime qualities of the Christian, the qualities that demonstrate the value of his faith, and that best prepare him for the coming of his Lord are—action, *action*, ACTION!

Turning again to our parable, we note a second point

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that calls for the subordinate or explanatory sketch. While the midnight thief well embodies the unexpectedness of the emergency, the householder cannot perfectly represent the situation of the disciple. He could not be continually prepared. To be sure, he might attend to the locks and defenses of his house, he might keep arms close at hand to repel the intruder; still these are but imperfect preparations. The man must sleep; he must attend to other matters that interfere with watchfulness; he cannot give his entire attention to anything so uncertain as the coming of a robber who may not come at all. He cannot employ a watchman, for that would entail greater loss than would be likely to result from burglary.

In contrast with this, the coming of the Son of man is an event sure to occur sooner or later, though the time is unknown; the preparation for the event is not dependent upon a knowledge of the time, but must be continuous, permanent. In the very nature of the case the householder could not be prepared; but the disciple, on the other hand, both can be and ought to be prepared. That he does not know the time of his Lord's return is no excuse for unpreparedness, for his ordinary activities are the means of his preparation, not a hindrance to it. Hence the picture of the servant is necessary to complete the thought. The servant is ready for his master's coming, however unexpected the time, if he is faithful in the discharge of his daily duties. If found unprepared, he will not think of pleading, "I knew not that you were approaching." Such an excuse would aggravate his guilt and add to the severity of his condemnation.

Now granting that action or conduct is the only true preparation for the coming of the Son of man, the question inevitably follows,—“What conduct?” By what form of activity are we best prepared to meet the returning Christ? We find our answer in the supplementary parable. The faithful and wise steward was at no loss what to do that he might receive his lord with gladness

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and win his unqualified approval. He simply attended to his business as he would have done in his master's presence. He made no *special* preparation for his return. He did not arrange a magnificent reception with a banquet and address of welcome. Nor did he call the household from their wonted occupations to watch for the master's coming. Nothing of the kind. He merely attended to the regular needs of the household, "giving them their meat in due season." How commonplace! Yet that is the complete record. The most ordinary kind of daily service regularly and faithfully performed, that is the conduct that receives the blessing.

Is it difficult to discover the present and permanent application of the picture? I think not. In a word, it is this: God does not require of his servants peculiar service in preparation for the Master's return. We shall best prepare for the extraordinary emergency by faithfulness in the most ordinary duties. "To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"—these are not unusual or extraordinary duties, but it is in doing these things perfectly that we prepare ourselves for whatever may come to us. Whoever neglects these simple duties of honesty, justice, kindness and piety, whoever ignores his responsibility to family or society while his eyes are turned heavenward in mock sanctity to watch for the coming of his Lord, will have no part in the millennial joy.

What a revelation of folly and unfaithfulness occurred half a century ago when multitudes, filled with the sudden expectation of the Lord's return, forsook all their ordinary occupations and gave themselves up to extravagant action by way of preparing for the great event! Business was neglected, household duties were left undone, farms were allowed to run wild, the claims of common reason and right were ignored, while men gave themselves up to religious frenzy and worship. They

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were like servants who have been consciously unfaithful during their master's absence and who, by rushing out to meet him on his return and by all manner of unnecessary attentions and fussy activity, seek to distract his attention from their unfinished tasks and to win from him words of praise or approval which their unfaithfulness does not merit.

The best proof of faithful and acceptable service is not seen in the readiness for extraordinary activity when the emergency arises, but in the little change that is made necessary by such a crisis. It is the unfaithful servant who must undertake new duties and enter upon fresh activities.

To some minds, yes, I fancy that to the majority of minds, the thought of the Lord's coming suggests the unwelcome or the dreadful. To the true Christian it should seem a joyful event. "Oh, but the unexpectedness of it! If I could only know when he will come!" And so not a few disciples weary their minds and souls in the effort to interpret the prophecies and to discover the time of our Lord's second advent. Does the true servant worry because he does not know just when his master will come? Does the honest bank teller or cashier live in constant dread because he does not know the day or the hour of the inspector's visit? No; he is ready all the time. The inspector may come to-day or to-morrow or when he will, and he will find everything in readiness. The books will balance to a cent. Every account will be clear and correct. It is the defaulter who wants to know when he shall be called to account. It is the dishonest man who wants time to doctor his accounts so that they shall seem to be right when in reality they are wrong.

This, then, is the supreme test of Christian living. Are you conscious of anything in your life which you would wish to change if you knew that the Lord were coming

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to-morrow? That very consciousness convicts you of present unfaithfulness. If you are living the true life, the honest life, the faithful life, then, though you knew that the Christ were coming to-night, you would go right on in the course you have planned; and when he came you would meet him with gladness and receive his warmest praise.

**The Peril and Penalty
of Uselessness**

CHAPTER XXXVI

The Peril and Penalty of Uselessness

THE FRUITLESS TREE

Luke 13:6-9

Text.—“*He came seeking fruit thereon, and found none.*”—Luke 13:6

THE reign of law” is a controlling notion in all modern scientific thought. More than this, the phrase is a popular catchword with the unscientific and shallow thinkers of our time. We all take delight in tracing the lines of cause and effect through every part of our life. We draw the parallels in the material and spiritual worlds, after Professor Drummond, and complacently work out various analogies of condition and result, fully persuaded that all this is very new and very wise.

As a matter of fact the idea is not at all new in its general application to human life, nor has it always the merit of being wise. From time immemorial thoughtful men have tried to discover a cause for every effect that has been observed, and to give some definite statement to the laws by which their little section of the universe is governed. If modern science has really contributed anything new in this direction, it has been only by way of clearer and more rational interpretation of old thought. Where old-time thinkers got the lines of relation tangled we are beginning to straighten them out; where they imagined connections that had no real existence we in-

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sist on tracing each strand of cause to its true source by methods of careful and thorough investigation.

The disciples of Jesus saw a blind man, and they came to the Master, saying, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" What was that but a recognition of the reign of law? The disciples were intelligent enough to perceive that in a world where God controlled all things by his omnipotence that blindness was not the result of mere chance, and with their limited data for reasoning upon such subjects they naturally concluded that its cause must be sin, for which the sufferer was either directly or indirectly responsible.

Others told Jesus of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and of the eighteen Jews upon whom the tower of Siloam had fallen, and they plainly implied by word and manner that those Galileans and Jews must have been exceptionally sinful to have brought upon themselves such dire calamities. Here again is the recognition of the reign of law.

True, both these interpretations of the idea are so crude and so childish that we of the present day dub them superstition; yet we ourselves often shoot as wide of the mark as did these same old-time religious philosophers. Indeed, we are quite sure to repeat their blunder in some form unless we supplement our recognition of the reign of law with an equally intelligent universal recognition of the reign of grace.

It was to illustrate and enforce the necessary relation between the reign of law and the reign of grace that Jesus spoke the parable of The Barren Fig Tree. While the story was told in answer to the question of his immediate hearers, it comes to us as a vivid epitome of the gospel of grace which we need no less than they. Its truths cluster about three figures:—(a) A fruitless tree, (b) an indignant owner, and (c) a pleading dresser.

First is the fruitless tree. "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit

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thereon, and found none." Jesus' questioners had been speaking of sin and sinners. He gives them a picture of the supreme sinner—the useless man, the fruitless soul. No lack of beauty is charged, no deformity, no imperfection, but simple fruitlessness. We talk of sins, of vices, of crimes; but this is the crime of crimes, the crowning vice, the capital sin—to live a useless life that neither helps mankind nor enriches the world by its service. Better is the criminal who has been tempted to his crime by some unexpected stress of his earnest effort for his fellow men than the person of immaculate character and eminent respectability who devotes all his energies to "keeping himself unspotted from the world."

We are very ready to trace the misfortunes of our most earnest and active brethren to their mistakes and wilful errors, but we are slow to understand that our own idleness and indifference is cause sufficient for worse calamity. As one has truthfully said, "We hear so much about the danger of wrong thinking and the danger of wrong-doing. There is the other danger, of not doing right and not thinking right, of not doing and not thinking at all. It is hard for many people to understand that there is danger and harm in that, the worst of harm and danger."

If there is one fact which, more than any other, impresses itself upon the mind of every earnest worker in God's kingdom, it is the way in which the vast majority of men and women live on in contented uselessness and, with no ill will but all good wishes, let the interests of their fellow men and of goodness and of God take care of themselves. To how many Christians, even, does the religious life present itself in the enthusiastic and inspiring aspect of working and fighting for God?

Fruitlessness indicates a lack of vitality. And there is a pitiful lack of moral and spiritual vitality in the world. In every community there is a multitude of useless men and women, yes, of men and women per-

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fectly satisfied with their uselessness. Many a one if he were to review his life could not point to one really useful thing in any large sense which he ever did. He never stood up for a good cause. He never remonstrated manfully, positively, against any evil. He never helped a bad man to do better, or rescued a good man from falling under temptation. A merely useless man. He might drop out of the host to-morrow and none would miss a soldier from the ranks. No onset or defense would be the weaker for his going.

Such persons are frequently popular members of society, clever, respectable, genial in manner and pleasing in appearance. They abhor the foulness of overt sin, they have no fellowship with that which is low or vile, they carefully avoid all acts that would soil their lives or shock their friends, but withal their lives are fruitless.

Fruitfulness, what is it but fulfilling the one great end of our existence? The fruitless tree, however symmetrical in form or resplendent in foliage, is a total failure as a tree and has no place in the vineyard. The life that bears no fruit of Christly service is equally a failure, although it may shine with the adornments of culture and learning and refinement.

Let us look upon this picture of the fruitless tree till it carves its message deep into our souls. It speaks of uselessness, of failure, of the very essence of sin and unworthiness. Year after year the owner cares for it and gives it liberal cultivation, but when he seeks fruit he finds none. What wonder that the second figure in the parable is that of the indignant owner of the vineyard? "Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Who is this vineyard owner? Whom or what does he stand for in the kingdom of righteousness? God the Father? Most certainly not! For the Master is

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trying to show his disciples that this is not God's way of dealing with men. He stands rather for the reign of law literally interpreted. His spirit and command represent the working of "natural law in the spiritual world" if the element of grace were excluded.

On every page of nature this law is written in clearest letters, *Fruitlessness invites destruction*. The failure to use a capacity or a faculty involves its loss. The neglect of an opportunity hinders the recurrence of an equal opportunity. Professor Drummond tells us that "there are certain burrowing animals—the mole, for instance—which have taken to spending their lives beneath the surface of the ground. And nature has taken revenge on them in a thoroughly natural way—she has closed their eyes. If they mean to live in darkness, she argues, eyes are obviously a superfluous function. By neglecting them these animals make it clear that they do not want them, and as one of nature's fixed principles is that nothing shall exist in vain, the eyes are presently taken away. There are fishes also which have to pay the same terrible forfeit for having made their abode in dark caverns where eyes can never be required."

The unused muscle of the idler grows soft and feeble. If it be kept in continual idleness, like the arm of the Indian fakir, it will finally perish beyond the possibility of restoration. The unused mind gradually lapses into childishness and imbecility. Not less surely does the neglect of spiritual power tend to spiritual weakness and death. The natural and perfectly just penalty for moral fruitlessness is moral annihilation.

I say that this penalty is not only natural but perfectly just. The idler is taking room and absorbing opportunities that might be employed more fruitfully by others. "Why cumbereth it the ground?" is the indignant question. The universe is infinite, and there is no lack of opportunity for all who will use it, but in all the boundlessness there is not room for a single idler.

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Whoever lives a useless life is robbing some other soul of the privileges which it yearns to use.

God requires fruit from every life, the fruit of Christly character and service, because he has given to every life the power to render such fruit. He has surrounded each life with opportunities. He has bestowed upon each life great possibilities. If one is not bearing fruit, he is hindering some other soul. The opportunities that one neglects another might improve. God only knows the immeasurable damage that is done by a fruitless church or a fruitless life. He only sees how many earnest souls are deprived of opportunity for personal growth and service by the selfishness of idlers.

Every fruitless disciple is a parasite in the kingdom of heaven, sapping its divine life and giving nothing in return. One cannot live a useless life without injuring others as well as self. If the only result of neglect were the loss to oneself, if it were merely to forfeit the glory and the blessing of fruit-bearing, that would not be so bad, though it were bad enough; but when our failure involves others in loss, when it robs the very treasury of the kingdom of heaven of its riches, then the unimpeachable justice of law becomes apparent.

Nevertheless, *Law* is not the last word of the parable. Law is not the absolute monarch of our life. This is God's universe, and everywhere the reign of grace may be seen softening and qualifying the reign of law.

The third figure of our picture is that of the pleading dresser of the vineyard. Hear his voice saying, "Let it alone this year also, and I will give it yet more care and cultivation, and then if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Here is an element of the divine character that we often overlook. The regularity and certainty of natural law are unquestionable, yet they are not mechanical and utterly heartless in their operation. It is not true that even the material universe is governed by an inexorable order that

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visits every failure with swift and severe penalties. On every hand there is at work another law that tends to mitigate the natural consequences of error or neglect or even of positive rebellion.

Notice for example the tremendous recuperative forces of nature. Whenever an accident befalls any creature the vital forces at once set themselves to repair the damage. Nature herself is the best of physicians. In fact, the best and wisest of human physicians can do nothing more than to secure the most favorable conditions for nature to accomplish her beneficent work. A bone is broken, and the surgeon sets the bone, as we say; but setting a bone does nothing towards healing the fracture. The knitting of the severed parts must be done by the forces of nature, and there are certain processes that at once set themselves in operation for this very purpose. It is the manifestation of the work of grace. So, too, when some one of God's children transgresses a moral law or yields to some evil habit, the natural result would be a rapid and overwhelming growth of evil. Following the law of seed-sowing and harvest, every sin indulged would produce a harvest of evil which would bring forth in its turn a greater harvest till the life was a hopeless wreck. But here again the reign of grace is manifest in the continuous intervention of motives and influences that work together to restore the will and strengthen right purpose till evil is rooted out and the life is re-established in purity and uprightness.

Grace always tempers the working of law in God's universe, because it is God's. There is no such thing as *inexorable* law. Between the two principles there is no antagonism. Grace and law work together for a common end, and that end is salvation. By all means to save man and to perfectly redeem the race, that is the purpose.

Law inexorable in its working would make of every sinner a Judas, hopeless in his unavailing remorse.

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Only grace could restore a Peter after his base denial. There is not a disciple who cannot make his own the words of the poet—

“With mercy and with justice
My web of time he wove:
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustered with his love.”

But even grace will not defend perpetual fruitlessness. Opportunity may be prolonged, but it has a limit, and continued, persistent uselessness must finally result in destruction. Let us not forget that. Grace is not a sop for uselessness, but a stimulus to hopeful activity and earnest service.

One cannot read this parable without feeling that it makes for itself a very direct and vivid application to present life and thought. Pharisee and publican, Jew and Galilean, disciple and caviler, all disappear as if by magic, and in their places we see the Church and the disciple to-day. It is *our* false philosophy that Jesus is answering. It is our false standard of life and duty that Jesus is rebuking. And this is the essence and meaning of his message—the peril and the penalty of fruitlessness.

That barren fig tree, does it not truthfully represent many a church and many an individual life among us? How often has God come to your life and mine by his Spirit, seeking fruit and finding none! Yet it has not been for lack of culture and care, not for lack of spiritual privilege or opportunity. It would seem as though the Almighty had well-nigh exhausted the wealth of his kingdom in pouring out blessings upon the people of this generation and this land. We are the heirs of all the spiritual inheritance of the ages. We are exalted to heaven in the matter of moral and religious privilege. Not a soul in the age and land but enjoys opportunities

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that call for highest achievement. We ought to be saints, every man and woman of us. Yet our lives are pitifully fruitless. We render exceedingly small returns for this great spiritual outlay.

I sometimes wonder that God does not sweep away the Church of the twentieth century as he swept away the Hebrew nation and as he swept away the churches of the Apocalypse. And so he surely would were he the mere administrator of a fixed system of law. The life of the Church in this age, the repeated opportunities for spiritual attainment and service that present themselves to us, all are witnesses to the reign of grace.

But who shall say how soon the day of grace may come to an end? Who shall say how soon the voice of mercy shall join with the voice of justice and judgment in the stern command, "Cut it down"? Oh, let the study of this parable awaken us to earnest, faithful service, that when next the Lord of the vineyard shall come, he may find a full return for all his care and love.

Excuses

CHAPTER XXXVII

Excuses

THE GREAT SUPPER

Luke 14:16-24

Text.—“*I pray thee have me excused.*”—Luke 14:18

MEN like to be humbugged,” said Barnum, the renowned showman. The saying proves him a wise philosopher. So well do men like to be humbugged that many will humbug themselves when no one else will do it for them.

There are certain delusions born of the Fall which men cherish with wonderful tenacity. They are handed down from generation to generation as a perpetual legacy, and they seem no less fascinating to-day than they were in the remotest ages of the past. Men hold them often at the peril of their immortal souls.

Let a single example suffice for illustration. Where can you find a man who does not flatter himself that deep down in his heart he loves righteousness and hates sin? Ask the indifferent man, or the selfish idler, or the open sinner, or the tempter of his fellows, the outwardly respectable or the abandoned wretch, and each will tell you that he admires the most perfect purity and holiness and that he would choose above all things else such a character for himself, that he longs for it and strives for it, but that in his case it is unattainable. Nature, surroundings, temperament, circumstances, all combine to

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put the coveted prize beyond his reach. In other words, they all wish to be godly, but God will not let them.

Against this particular delusion is aimed the parable of The Excuses. Jesus is sitting at a feast in the house of a leading Pharisee, and is surrounded by persons who are quite ready to discuss his teaching in the abstract, but who have no desire for personal enlightenment or salvation. As is his wont, he seizes the opportunity to utter some pointed and practical truths, and the conversation is becoming a trifle one-sided and uncomfortable for some of his listeners.

Just at this moment one of the audience, wishing to show how perfectly they all accord with Jesus on the vital point of the desire for righteousness, exclaims, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" It was a brilliant remark—so true, so pious, above all, so well sounding. Can you not almost hear the murmur of approval that ran around the whole company? Can you not see that look of relief that hails the glittering generality as a foil to the sharp thrust of Jesus' words? More than one in the company said in his heart, "I wish I had said that." And every man among them responds with a silent "Amen!"

Yes, I doubt not the speaker really thought he meant what he said. And the rest of the company thought they meant it too. The delusion that they longed to enter into the kingdom of God was the very essence of their religion, as it often is of ours.

But the Master is not at all dazzled by this brilliant utterance. To him it is transparent nonsense, and he immediately prepares to prick the bubble of platitude, and to destroy the glittering but unsubstantial delusion. A parable is his chosen instrument; and these are its salient points:—

A certain man made a supper, and bade many. At supper time he sends out his servants to call the guests to the feast. Instead of coming, they send back flimsy

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excuses for staying away. Indignant at the slight, the host sends out his servants once and again to gather in whomsoever they may from the streets and lanes, that his house may be filled.

Nothing is said of the effect of the story. Nothing need be said. There can be but one effect. The bubble has burst. For that brilliant exclamation was only a bubble—glitter and gas, that is all. It could not bear the touch of hard truth.

Blessed is it to eat bread in the kingdom of God? Then why are you not doing it? Why, when the invitation comes, when the opportunity offers, do you hold back? Why do you put this blessedness from you with all manner of excuses and subterfuges and falsehoods? Why do you satisfy yourself with commonplace delights when this supreme blessing is within your reach?

No one of his hearers could fail to recognize his own likeness in the parable. Even the pious old humbug who had voiced the popular delusion so perfectly could not doubt that this was a true reflection of himself, invited to the feast which he had declared so blessed but inventing excuses for staying away. The parable is a most complete answer to all who, like this man, deceive themselves with the notion that they long for the life of God's kingdom but are not permitted to enjoy it. See how it unmasks their delusion at every point.

First of all, the delusion rests upon the idea that the heavenly and the earthly life are necessarily antagonistic. The pleasures of the kingdom are really the highest and best, but they imply the loss of all earthly joy. The godly life is the life unnatural, a gloomy, solemn, straitlaced life, that can be enjoyed only by persons of a very peculiar disposition and that is wholly impracticable for the average person, especially in youth. Such is the notion that has obtained in many minds throughout the ages.

The introduction to the parable is aimed at this notion.

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"A certain man made a great supper." *A supper!* There is the symbol of true earthly pleasure, especially to an Oriental mind. By no other figure could our Lord have expressed to that audience so attractively the idea of real happiness as by a feast. This is his favorite symbol for the kingdom of heaven. Here it is "a great supper." Elsewhere it is a wedding festival; and yet again, the marriage-feast of a king's son.

According to the common notion, the kingdom of heaven is like a funeral procession, slow and solemn. Its atmosphere is laden with tears and sighs. But you may review the whole course of our Lord's teaching never so carefully and you will find no such figures used. No, it is the festival, the occasion of joy and gladness, the most delightful thing in life. Again and again the divine Artist sketches for us the joyous procession, the brilliantly lighted hall, the laden tables, and the happy company gathered together.

What is his thought? Is it not clear? The life of holiness, salvation, religion, is really a joyful thing. That is the gospel that Jesus preached. God does not command us to purchase future peace by the sacrifice of truest joy here and now. He calls us from the husks of the swineherd to the abundance and delight of the royal banquet. He calls us to the largest and most enduring happiness for young and old in this present life. The unholy man knows nothing of real and unqualified happiness. If you want to make the most of this world, be a Christian. To eat your daily bread in the kingdom of God will transform the humblest and most scanty meal into a royal feast.

And the measure of your enjoyment will be the degree of your consecration and self-sacrifice. "When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets." The song always begins with the sacrifice, and its gladness and harmony ever keep pace with the surrender and unselfish effort. If you have seen

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unhappy Christian lives, solemn lives, gloomy lives, it was because there was *so little* Christianity in them. Whole-hearted Christianity, unhesitating sacrifice and surrender, makes men happy. Every true disciple ought to be perpetually singing—"There is sunshine in my soul." There is always sunshine and gladness and music in the soul that is given up to pure and Christlike service.

Again, the delusion that I have spoken of rests upon the notion that the influences of this world are all against the heavenly life. The sinner is ever ready to excuse his sin on the ground of temptation. "I would do right and be right, but my temperament, my circumstances, my surroundings, all combine to draw me in the wrong direction," says even the most ungodly. And the Christian Church joins the general chorus, and sings—

"Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God"?

All of which simply means that God has so made us and so placed us that it is practically impossible for us to do what he commands. Men talk of temptation as though the only moral forces in the world were those that draw them away from God. Now is that true? Are there no temptations to righteousness? Are there no forces drawing us to the life of holiness and truth? What says the parable?

The giver of the banquet sends out the first general invitation. Then, when the supper is ready, he sends out his servants to each invited guest to remind him that all is prepared. And when the invited guests reject his kindness, he sends out with greatest urgency to bring in others to take their places that the banquet-hall may be filled with guests.

What shall we say of the difference between the guests first invited and those called later? Whom do they in

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each case represent? That is a question with which we are not vitally concerned. I see here not so much a suggestion of the difference between God's chosen people and the world at large as a picture of the divine persistency in seeking to fill his house. God wants heaven to be filled. He wishes you and me to enter into its joy. Too long we have pictured him to ourselves as indifferent or even as hindering us from coming. Such a picture is a libel on the character of God. He is ever throwing around us influences to draw us to himself. The devil is active and eager in his efforts to entrap and destroy us, but God is more active and eager in his efforts to save us.

You say there are numberless temptations for you to do wrong. Are there no forces to help you to do right? Are there no influences to draw you to the Christian life? What of the invitations of God's Spirit that have been repeated to you many times? What of the earnest appeal of the Christian Church? What of the eager desire of loving friends for your salvation? What of the voice of conscience within warning you against the wrong and urging you to the right? I tell you it is easier to do right than it is to do wrong, easier to be righteous than to be sinful. You never do wrong but by the positive putting away of the influences that draw you towards the right.

Which is easier, to maintain one's physical life in perfect obedience to the laws of health or in disregard of those laws? True, one need make no effort to disregard those laws. He may do harmful things without knowing it. He may take poison through sheer ignorance. But when he has disobeyed the laws of health, then it requires infinitely more pains to save the life than it would have required in the first place to avoid error. So it requires set purpose to walk in the way of righteousness; but once the life is given to the service of God, habits of righteousness are formed, ties of brotherhood

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are knit, and there is an increasing force of good influence working in us, daily weakening the force of evil.

You think that God is against you in the struggle. I repeat, God wants heaven to be filled. He wants you now to live in and to enjoy the heavenly life. He is working and pleading for that, and you can fail of it only by deliberately putting away the influences which at this very moment he throws around you.

Now look at the third point, the excuses for refusing the invitation. With this point Jesus punctures the delusion from the other side. What are the excuses?

a. "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it."

b. "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them."

c. "I have married a wife."

These different excuses may have some individual significance, but that does not appear to us. They have one common characteristic, absurdity, and that is enough for the purpose of the parable. Not one of the excuses has any foundation in reality. The first two matters could easily have been deferred had there been any desire to go to the supper, and the third was the best of reasons for going. The first weeks and months of married life were ever the time of special festivity and holiday.

Plainly the thought is this: These men did not wish to go to the supper, and the excuses were trumped up for the occasion. There is an Oriental fable which runs as follows: A certain man went to his neighbor to borrow a rope. The neighbor replied, "I cannot lend it to you, for I am using it myself to tie up a heap of sand." "But," said the first, "you cannot tie up sand with a rope." "Oh, yes," returned the other, "you can do almost anything with a rope when you do not wish to lend it."

The application of the parable is no less plain than its

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interpretation. The reasons which men give for not accepting the divine invitation are false. Often their excuses for not coming to God are the best of reasons for coming. "The sinner's *cannot* is always in reality the sinner's *will not*."

We may talk as we please about the blessedness of the heavenly life. We may persuade ourselves that we really long to live that life and to share its joy. But if we are not actually doing it, the one reason is to be found in our own wills. Our professions of desire are not sincere. We may have a certain admiration for the true life (and who does not?), but there are other things which we prefer. If we choose the world and worldly occupations and pleasures, if we are wholly absorbed with material things, it is because we believe that these are more immediately profitable and pleasure-giving than spiritual things. The choice is ever before us and we are free to take which we will. When we fail of the highest and best life, we pity ourselves and exclaim, "We could not"; but God says, "*Ye would not*."

Here, then, is the teaching of the parable in a few words. The life to which God calls you, the Christian life, the life of holiness and self-sacrifice, is a happy life. The heavenly Father does not wish to deprive any of his children of good, but rather to give them ever the highest good. He calls you to a feast, to a life of joy and gladness for this world as well as for the world to come.

Furthermore, he has not simply provided this and left you to choose while he waits the issue with indifference. Still less has he made it hard for you to secure the blessing, placing you in a world where Satan has chief power to ensnare you with his wiles while you get no help to withstand him. God has surrounded you with influences to help you. He has sent countless messages of invitation to you. If you do not enter into the heavenly life and joy, it is not because you cannot, but because you will not.

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Be honest with yourself. Be sincere. Do not pretend that you wish to be a Christian but cannot. Do not deceive yourself with the notion that you are trying to live the true life, when all the while you prefer another and a lower mode of existence. Look yourself squarely in the face and confess that you are not a Christian simply and solely because you do not wish to be one. You are given over to the world. Sincerity is the first step towards better things. Be honest with yourself and then you will be prepared to hear the voice of God more clearly.

Many are the messengers that God has sent to invite you to his feast. Many are the voices that are calling you to a better life. Many are the influences drawing you to Christ. Thousands of times in the Scriptures we find the blessed word, "*Come.*" On the last page of the Bible we have the invitation pressed upon every reader with cumulative force, as though God were loath to cease his pleading:—

“And the Spirit and the Bride say, *Come.*

And let him that heareth say, *Come.*

And let him that is athirst *come.*

And whosoever will, let him *come,*”

and eat his daily bread in the kingdom of God.

The Christian Ideal of Duty



CHAPTER XXXVIII

The Christian Ideal of Duty

THE PLOUGHING SERVANT

Luke 17:7-10

Text.—“*When ye shall have done all . . . say, . . . We have done that which it was our duty to do.*”—Luke 17:10

BLESSED is that life upon which the word “Duty” is writ large. Such a life will not fail to be noble, fruitful, and in the truest sense happy. Few words in the language are more significant than this. Would you learn the secret of British character and supremacy? Listen to those immortal words of Nelson as he prepares his fleet for battle, “England expects every man to do *his duty!*” Do you ask, Whence came the moral strength and purpose of our fathers, which enabled them to overcome all obstacles in the settlement of a new land and to impress their own character upon succeeding generations? I answer, It sprang from the profound sense of *duty* that was closely interwoven with the very warp and fiber of their life.

And this word “duty” is one of the key-words of Christianity. Omit it, and you emasculate the gospel, you make the religion of Jesus a mere sentiment, a matter of whims and fancies and feelings. Retain it, give it a worthy place, and religion becomes virile, puissant, stable. Read the life of Jesus and note how frequently he uses the word “must” regarding himself. From that early day when he said of himself, “I must be about

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my Father's business," to the very close of his ministry, he was spurred onwards by a perpetual "must," a profound and all-controlling sense of duty. Nor was it otherwise with the great apostle. Hear his ringing declaration, "I am *debtor*." The sense of indebtedness, which is the essence of duty, was the inspiration of his noble life and untiring service. This same sense of duty is the foundation of all manliness in religion, the pith of all moral and spiritual power.

The parable before us brings us face to face with this vital principle of all true godliness. It finds its climax in the supreme recognition of duty. The connection of the parable with the preceding verses is loose and somewhat indistinct. Practically it stands alone and must be interpreted as an independent picture. Just what suggested it to Jesus' mind at the time when it was uttered is not easy to determine. In fact, the time itself seems really indeterminate, since the opening portion of the seventeenth of Luke is made up of utterances apparently fragmentary and disconnected.

It is not difficult, however, to imagine the conditions which called forth the parable. The tendency to be satisfied with partial service, to set narrow limits to duty, to aim at easy honors in religion, is a common weakness. The early disciples were not free from this tendency. Only by the constant reiteration of higher ideals were they gradually led forth from the selfishness of their primitive notions to a conception of religious life and service that was worthy of the strongest manhood.

The sketch is actual rather than ideal. Its appeal as a picture is not to the conscience of his hearers, but to their daily experience and practise. It portrays life as it is, not life as it might be, or as it ought to be. It asks not what God would do, but what they themselves would do and expect under given circumstances. The reader of to-day would scarcely sympathize with the somewhat ungracious master, although his manner and

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conduct would doubtless meet with the unqualified approval of those to whom the parable was spoken. We do not see in this man a perfect representative of the heavenly Father; nevertheless the picture as a whole is a perfect illustration of the truth which it is designed to teach. The high lights are not cast upon the master at all, but upon the spirit and expectation of the servant. He is the central figure of the sketch. All else is background.

Look, then, at the servant. As a true servant, he is wholly occupied with service. His chief concern is not with thanks or praise or honor or wages, but to do well and faithfully the work that falls to him. Not that he is a drudge, a slave, a machine, but that he has a part, however humble it may be, in the world's work, and to make that part complete, perfect, is the first obligation of his life. That is duty; it is the debt he owes to himself, to his master, to God. That duty is absolute. It is not conditioned upon his master's gratitude or kindness or anything else. It is a debt that he is bound to pay in full.

This servant, I say, is the central figure of the parable. He is the true type of discipleship and of all highest service. The best thing about a great deed is that it be done without thought of greatness; the best goodness is unconscious goodness. What a splendid picture of heroism is presented to us in the story of Nehemiah! When in time of great danger that noble statesman-prophet is urged to flee into the temple for safety, he replies, "Who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life?" That question enhances the glory of his action tenfold, for it proclaims the unconscious hero. Nehemiah thinks it is but commonplace, every-day faithfulness, such as any other in his position would manifest. In point of fact, not one man in a thousand would have done as he did. Your true hero is always modest, because he never knows that he is a hero.

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So also your true philanthropist or benefactor never thinks of philanthropy. Self-conscious benevolence is not kindness; it is often the most painful cruelty. The service or self-sacrifice that keeps a careful credit account and ever demands due appreciation or thanks is a sham and a delusion. The loving mother is unconscious of any sacrifice as she freely spends time, strength and life for her child, even though that child repays her love with base ingratitude. Any sense of sacrifice detracts just so much from the glory and the genuineness of mother love. Expectation of thanks will dull the luster of the finest action. We seek to prove our love to God by our readiness to take up this or that "cross" in his service, but the very fact that we call our service a *cross* is evidence of the weakness, not the strength, of our love. We have not caught the true ideal of Christian service till we can say after the most arduous labor, the most exacting sacrifice—

"When I'm not thanked at all, I'm thanked enough.
I've done my duty, and I've done no more."

The Christian Ideal of Duty, therefore, is the topic which our parable illuminates. What are some of the distinctive features of that ideal which it portrays?

First of all, to my mind, it speaks this truth, *Who seeks earthly praise forfeits heavenly grace*. Any sort of work that is done for pay alone, or with a principal outlook towards some reward, degrades the workman, but the humblest task done for love exalts the doer and becomes an added blessing in his life. The servant who always looks for tips inevitably becomes a flunky though he be a collegian. Even the artist or the poet may strangle the divine spirit within him for the sake of wealth or fame or other reward, and so be cast down from the heights of genius to the common plane of hack or artisan. The spirit of commercialism, the growing

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habit of demanding material return for every service rendered to individuals or society, the careful balancing of work and pay, is undermining the character of the age. What! Shall we not receive pay for our work? If not, how shall we live? Certainly we must receive pay for our work; but always the first and most prominent thought of the workman in whatsoever sphere should be of his work, not of his pay. To do work worthy of his manhood, to use his powers fully and effectively, is every man's duty whether he is fairly paid for it or not. Let him make sure of this first, that he is doing the most and the best work of which he is capable; then let him secure such reward as he may.

The best service is never adequately paid in this world. The president of Harvard College receives no larger salary than the *chef* of one of Boston's leading hotels. The best men in public office, whether municipal or national, have ever been those that have accepted the trusts to which they were chosen at great personal sacrifice. They are men whose professional or business incomes have been much greater than the salaries received while in office. In fact, the man who seeks a public office because of the stipend attached is not worthy the office he seeks. He who limits his work by the pay he receives, though he adjust the balance never so accurately, is a public malefactor. Men may call him honest, but he cannot escape the judgment of God, who calls him unfaithful. This is the penalty of such measured service—loss of joy and satisfaction in the work itself, deterioration of skill and power, and a general lowering of the whole tone of manhood. He only can escape the moral and spiritual decay that result from commercialism who resolutely exalts the ideal of duty above reward, who is supremely conscious of the debt he owes to the world, and suffers himself to forget what the world owes him.

Not to win applause or to accumulate merit, but to

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discharge the soul's indebtedness, is the ruling motive of every true life. This sense of indebtedness does not imply a slavish spirit, nor does it make drudgery of our life work. Understood aright, it is a continual inspiration to tireless endeavor; its result is growing spiritual strength, increasing earnestness and devotion. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," says the Master; and the unvarying experience of the ages proves that heavenly grace comes not to those who are supremely conscious of their own merit, but rather to those who are ever conscious of duty,—i. e., of *debt*. He had caught the first lesson of our parable who wrote the lines,

"Life is not long enough to let me work
As I desire; but all the years will hold
Shall I pour forth. Perhaps it may be mine
To do some deed was never done before,
And clear my obligation to the world."

A second truth clearly illustrated by our parable is this: *The doing of one duty does not excuse the neglect of another*. The true life is complete, symmetrical. Moral obligation implies perfection. The servant in the picture held a twofold position; he was both an outdoor and an indoor servant. Faithfulness in the field did not release him from the duty of house service. Now whatever our more enlightened modern views of service may lead us to think of the conditions here represented, we know that, from the standpoint of the times in which the scene was enacted, the servant as well as the master would consider the twofold demand as perfectly reasonable; hence it is a clear case of moral obligation.

As such, it perfectly represents our relation to duty in the highest sense—our duty to God. Men may be, men often are, unreasonable in their demands upon us. They require that which is beyond our power. They lay bur-

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dens upon us which we are unable to bear. Not so with God. With him, ability is always the measure of moral obligation. "She hath done what she could" is the Master's description of a perfect service. The same words applied to any life would testify that the life was perfect. "I ought, therefore I can," is the statement of universal truth; for whatever we cannot do it is no part of our duty to do.

Yet is duty more far-reaching than most of us are willing to acknowledge. We are only too ready to content ourselves with the partial and the incomplete. Because we are faithful, perhaps conspicuously zealous, in some one sphere of service, we easily condone our neglect in another sphere. The Pharisees of old imagined that because they scrupulously tithed the mint and the anise and the cummin they were excusable for neglect of "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." The modern Pharisee more often makes his honesty or his kindness or his benevolence an excuse for the neglect of religious life and service. The one position is as irrational as the other. Both are unchristian. The rocks of Scylla are no less fatal than the crags of Charybdis.

There is no clashing of duties in God's kingdom, no overlapping of obligations. In the perfect life there is room for all service. Each part exactly fits into its corresponding part, so that there is no crowding or disagreement. God's plan for you and for me is like a perfect chord of music in which all the different notes combine in one noble harmony. God asks of no man anything that he has not the time and the strength and the sense to do perfectly. When we excuse our neglect of one class of duties on the score of superior faithfulness in another sphere, the Christ of to-day replies, as of old, "These ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." Halfness is infidelity. Incompleteness is sin. Perfect righteousness is the only righteousness.

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A third truth lies on the very surface of the parable before us. Let me put it into a single sentence: *There are no works of supererogation.* The phrase sounds strange to Protestant ears, but to the Romanist it is familiar enough. "Works of supererogation," according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic theologians, are such good deeds as men may perform over and above what is necessary for their own salvation. They are such acts of benevolence or kindness or self-sacrifice as surpass the requirements of morality or righteousness, and are therefore specially meritorious.

Protestantism repudiates the phrase and denies the fact; yet in many a heart the old belief still lurks under a new form. Most of us draw a line somewhere between the ethical and the super-ethical or saintly. Some extend the bounds of duty and morality far beyond the limits set by others; yet they are few who do not fix a standard within which all is duty and beyond which is a goodly circle where every action is optional and implies an extraordinary degree of merit.

In this outer circle we are wont to place the sufferings of the martyrs, the heroism of distinguished patriots, the sacrifices of missionaries, the gifts of the benevolent, all deeds of charity and kindly service, unusual forbearance and the spirit of continuous forgiveness. An employer pays his workmen promptly and justly, and we call it ethical. Out of his wealth he improves their condition and we call it benevolence. A father provides for his family and we call it duty. From his surplus income he clothes a few poor or extends his care beyond his immediate family circle and we call it charity. A brilliant social queen maintains a pure life and an unsullied character and we call it morality. She manifests an interest in her less favored sisters or devotes some of her time and influence to the rescue of the fallen and we call it bounty.

Thus in every realm we distinguish sharply between

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the obligatory and the optional. The one class of acts, limited and definite, represents universal duty; the other class, infinite in its range, excites our admiration but does not appeal to the common conscience. To pour out one's wealth in response to human need, to give one's life freely in self-sacrifice for others, this we readily acknowledge to be a universal privilege, but seldom think it a moral necessity. The philanthropy of a Howard, the devotion of a Florence Nightingale or a Clara Barton, the munificence of a Carnegie, the heroic self-sacrifice of a Mary Reed, these and all similar acts we deem *extra* moral. They transcend the realm of duty and are to be reckoned in the higher realm of charity.

Now Jesus knew no such distinction. To him nothing was extra moral, nothing was transcendent. The supreme act of self-renunciation was to him plainest duty, and power to its utmost was fraught with moral obligation; and this, not because he was different from other men, but because he was like them. Heroism, sacrifice, benevolence—these are but other names for duty, plain duty. "When ye shall have done all those things . . . say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."

Does this seem a hard saying, a disheartening ideal? It will cease to be such when we realize that duty is but opportunity in the ore, and its product is not praise, even though it be the praise of God; rather is it character and life. For salvation is not a judicial pronouncement. It is an actual rescue and transfiguration. If we toil and sacrifice and suffer, it is not that we may satisfy the exacting demands of a sovereign, but that we may enrich ourselves with all the fulness of the highest life. Too often we picture duty as a hard taskmaster standing over us lash in hand and requiring of us a full tale of bricks even when the necessary straw is withheld. It were nearer the truth to see in each service a brick, in each sacrifice a block of finely polished marble, which

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we may build into a noble palace for our eternal habitation. If God summons us to toil and trial, it is not that he may be enriched or in any way profited by our service, but that we ourselves may be redeemed, sanctified, glorified.

Men magnify the mere incidents of service, the praise, the blame, the thanks, the criticism. The Christ ever magnifies the service itself, and that which is the essential fruit of service, even life and character. Appreciation is pleasant and material rewards are gratifying, but service itself is necessary, the only necessary thing; and there is no service, however trifling, however arduous, but enfolds within itself its own adequate reward. That it makes a hero is the amplest recompense of heroism, though no monument commemorate the deed or any word of grateful recognition be ever spoken. Not the name of saint nor a place in the Church's calendar is the true reward of martyrdom, but to have been made saintly, to have purged away the dross of sin and brought forth the pure gold of righteousness.

We externalize God. We put a difference between his glory and our own highest good, and so duty seems hard. Could we but realize continually that God is within us, that he has no desire for us apart from our perfect happiness and well-being, that when we are working for God we are in reality "working out our own salvation," then would service be transformed, and every task would seem a privilege. To the slave every smallest service is a burden, it is hateful. But the free man, toiling for his own enrichment, rejoices in every increase of labor that promises proportionate return. The student for joy of knowledge and discovery takes delight in study though it strain his eyes and waste his frame far beyond the midnight hour. The artist for the very gladness of creation toils with chisel or brush, unwearied, long after the artisan has laid aside his tools in wear-

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ness. It was "for the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame."

Then let us rid ourselves of this slavish idea of service that dominates mankind, this idea that sees in work an enemy and a curse, and aims chiefly at external rewards. Let us exalt duty until it shall seem to us a noble thing—yes, the noblest thing; and we shall gladly make our own those eager words of surrender and allegiance:

"Stern Daughter of the Voice of God, O Duty!
I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
O, let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth, thy bondman
let me live."

A Concluding Parable of Jesus

CHAPTER XXXIX

A Concluding Parable of Jesus

THE TWO BUILDERS

Matt. 7:24-29; Luke 6:46-49

Text.—“*He is like a man building a house.*”—Luke 6:48

JESUS sums up the preface to his greatest series of parables in the words, “Take heed how ye hear.” Had he seen fit to condense this concluding parable in a similar way, its exhortation would be, “Take heed what ye do.” For as the significance of the former parable turns upon hearing, so the lesson of this one is, the importance of doing. To properly apprehend truth we must hear it aright, there must be attention, appropriation, assimilation. To make the truth of any value to our lives, we must put it into practise. Its worth is measured in units of action.

“The great question regarding every man is not, How much truth does he put into his creed? but, How much truth does he put into his life?” The practical value of every creed must be estimated by its influence on character and conduct. Truth is worthless if it be not tributary to action. The learning that does not transfigure life is a dead loss. Practise is the goal of all true preaching. Even the gospel finds its sole vindication in the growing righteousness of the peoples that have received it. Jesus Christ did not thrust himself before men as an expounder of new truths. He did not come to establish a new school of theology or philosophy. The

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world already had truth enough. The mind of man was overburdened with hair-splitting philosophy, and men's souls were bewildered with contradictory and impracticable religious dogmas.

Jesus came to clear away much of the useless rubbish which blocked the pathway of human salvation. He came to lead men in the practise of truth as old as eternity. He came to regenerate human life and action. When the multitudes listened with wonder to his simple but searching discourses, he said to them again and again, "Be not mere hearers but doers of the truth." Other religions were speculative. Their teachings were far removed from the affairs and activities of every-day life. The teachings of Jesus Christ touch life at every point. Christianity as set forth in his ministry is simply religion as an applied science.

It was at the close of that most remarkable discourse, "The Sermon on the Mount," that Jesus spoke the parable of The Two Builders. I have taken the sketch out of its original setting and chronological position, yet I have done no violence to its meaning or purpose. I propose to use it precisely as the Master used it—as a final blow of the hammer to drive home a series of practical and important truths. It is not an independent or isolated lesson. It is rather a concluding appeal, a final word of application to a more extended homily, a barb to the arrow already flown.

We have been studying together the entire series of our Lord's parables. We have brought forth from the divine treasure-house things new and old. Now the vision is past. The matchless panorama is completed. We close the book and are about to lay it aside; but the Great Teacher bids us tarry a moment. While the pictures are still fresh in our minds he will enforce the lessons they have suggested. "The words of the wise are as . . . nails," says the writer of Ecclesiastes. True

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enough! And a nail is the more secure if clinched. The parable of The Two Builders is a clincher.

Listen! "Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it; because it had been well builded. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation; against which the stream brake, and straightway it fell in; and the ruin of that house was great." Such is the parable in its less familiar form as recorded by Luke. The simplicity and directness of the utterances almost preclude the necessity of exposition. Difficult indeed is it to make either clearer or more forcible that which is in itself so perfectly lucid. The application lies upon the very surface.

As mere specimens of literature the parables are unique. The stories and sketches are classic. We admire them as the artistic soul admires a rare collection of beautiful pictures. We may study them as realistic tales of Oriental life and manners. We may take a scholar's delight in tracing out their many and varied lines of analogy and in bringing to light the almost endless shades of truth which they present. We may exhaust their stores of figure and fact, of illustration and argument; and with all this we may utterly fail to discover their true value or to appropriate the blessing which they are designed to convey.

We have many diverse canons of interpretation. We announce our principles and lay down our rules. Yet, after all has been said and written, there is but one ultimate and infallible rule for interpreting the parables, one method of extracting the kernel from all of Jesus' teachings. *They must be interpreted in the life.* The heavenly vision must be made an earthly reality.

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Every parable embodies a principle, and the exhortation of Him who spake the parable is not "Admire," or "Discuss," or even "Believe," but "*Do*." "Let this principle inspire to action, direct effort, control purpose." "Upon this truth lay the foundations of character and conduct." You may be saying in your heart that you have gained some new ideas from this review of our Lord's words. Very likely. But have you formed any new purposes? Have you entered any new fields of service? Have you cultivated any new graces of character, or developed any new skill or strength in action? In short, has this review of the parables led you to *do* anything nobler, better, more helpful than before? This is the question of questions, the ultimate test of the value of the parables to you.

Let us be specific. There is the parable of The Sower. Has it made you a more earnest, attentive and fruitful hearer of God's truth? Has the parable of The Ten Virgins stimulated you to a more careful and thorough cultivation of character? You have admired the action of The Good Samaritan as portrayed in the Gospel page, but has your study of his example made you more neighborly? How about those parables on prayer—The Friend at Midnight, The Importunate Widow, the Pharisee and the Publican? You grasped their meaning perhaps more clearly than ever before, but have your own prayers been more persistent, more trustful, more genuine than they formerly were? The parable of The Talents has been studied in vain unless we have brought forth our talents from their hiding-places and put them at interest for the enrichment of their owner. The parable of The Pounds might as well have been unuttered so far as we are concerned, or spoken to lifeless rocks, if we are not striving for the tenfold increase in our own lives. So we might go over the entire list of the parables. If there be a single parable the lesson of which we have not reproduced in our own lives, that para-

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ble is a dead letter to us and might as well be blotted from the Bibles.

It is not the parable in the New Testament that is to bless mankind, but the parable in human life. When we can read in the daily conduct of every Christian the lesson of The Good Shepherd, of The Marriage Feast, and of The Good Samaritan, then we may be sure that the millennium is not far away.

Thus much by way of general suggestion. Turn we now to our parable for more specific study and interpretation.

"Every one that . . . heareth my words, and doeth them, . . . is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon a rock."

"Building a house." First we see a general suggestion. Looking upon that word "house" as generic, it becomes simply a typical structure, a *building*. From this point of view it may represent any architectural creation from a cottage to a cathedral, from a warehouse to a watch-tower. As such it is the embodiment of external beauty or of material strength and stability.

But this does not exhaust the symbolism. The house stands for a *home*. It is a specific word as well as generic. It has a social no less than an architectural significance. "An Englishman's house in his castle," says the popular proverb. About the word "home" cluster thoughts of refuge, of rest, of security and peace.

First, then, let us think of this word "house" as an architectural term. We are looking at a building, a structure merely. We are concerned with the laws of stability, the conditions of permanence and strength. From this point of view the house of the parable becomes a type of human character, of the "House not made with hands." Every disciple of Jesus Christ is an architect. Every hearer of truth is a builder of some sort. We are building, all of us whether we will or no, for time and for eternity. The figure is a common one and vividly

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suggestive. Character or soul is the grandest of all human creations. It is a work of measureless importance to the builder; and the conditions of success for the spiritual builder are no less definite and clear than those which govern his fellow craftsman in wood and stone.

“Souls are built as temples are,—
Sunken deep, unseen, unknown,
Lies the sure foundation stone.
Then the courses framed to bear,
Lift the cloisters pillared fair.
Last of all the airy spire,
Soaring heavenward, higher and higher,
Nearest sun and nearest star.

Souls are built as temples are,
Based on truth's eternal law,
Sure and steadfast, without flaw.
Through the sunshine, through the snows,
Up and on the building goes;
Every fair thing finds its place,
Every hard thing lends a grace,
Every hand may make or mar.”

Now the first, the immediate aim of the gospel is the transformation of character. The most fatal result of sin is not the sorrow and misery which it causes, however great these may be, but rather the decadence of character, the loss of soul, the gradual but certain defacing of the divine image. And Jesus came that man might receive power to restore that which had been lost through sin, to rebuild that which the arch-enemy had thrown down.

Christian culture and progress have given to the world many a noble pile of masonry: a St. Peter's in Rome, a St. Paul's in London, a Cologne cathedral, a Westminster

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ster Abbey, and the numberless temples and cathedrals and churches that are found in every part of Christendom; but these with all their beauty and grandeur, with all that they represent of labor and cost and consecration, are not for a moment to be compared with those infinitely nobler structures that adorn the landscape of the ages, the characters of Christ's worthy followers, the saints named and unnamed in every clime, who by doing the words of Jesus at whatever cost of pain and sacrifice have at last built the completed temple like the pattern shown them in the Mount.

The sayings of Jesus are the plans of the divine Architect for the building of the perfect life. Our deeds are the stones with which we build day by day the growing structure of character. If these deeds are molded by the teachings of Christ, if they faithfully reproduce the plan, then will the character which we build be true and Christly. It will be the expression of moral strength and symmetry. It will be firm and immovable, and proof against the storms of trial and temptation. If, on the other hand, we see and admire the plan but fail to reproduce it in our conduct, then, although we may for a time present a fair appearance to the world and may flatter ourselves that we are as good as others, the first storm of trial will betray our weakness and overthrow the structure which we have built.

This, I say, is the first and general message of the builder; but there is a second element in the symbolism of our parable. The word "house" suggests the specific as well as the generic; it represents not a building merely, but a *home* with all the hallowed associations, the precious ideals, the blessed influences that are enfolded in that word.

Seen in this light, the house becomes the type of the soul's eternal hope. It symbolizes all that is included in that broad and often misused term "salvation." There is the sense of security and assurance that all is well.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

There is rest of soul, peace with God, and peace with self. There is moral strength and spiritual equilibrium that cannot be disturbed by the turmoil of the world. There is also the hope of a yet brighter and more glorious heaven in the future. "In my Father's house are many mansions, . . . I go to prepare a place for you."

Between the mere "house" and the true "home" the difference is heaven-wide. This difference is quite independent of the external appearance of the structure. Some of our public institutions, our hotels, our asylums, our retreats, yes, even many of our prisons are far more elegant and costly structures than the cottages of the poor; yet the meanest hut that embodies a true home is unspeakably dearer to the souls that find refuge there than is the most splendid pile of masonry that has no further purpose than to furnish a center where a given number of human beings may gather to eat and drink and sleep and find protection from the inclemency of the weather.

Is not a like contrast easily drawn between the character that is fashioned upon the most perfect principles of lifeless moral philosophy and the character that grows out of a loving fellowship with Jesus Christ in the daily life; between the righteousness which is of the law and the righteousness which is by faith? Here is your merely philosophical moralist who fashions his life by certain maxims. "Honesty is the best policy," he says; therefore he is honest. "Virtue is its own reward"; therefore he is virtuous. Now it may be that the character thus constructed is noble and grand, but it is without joy, without vitality. There is no real peace, no permanent blessing growing out of it. It is the soul's lodging-place, but not its home. Let the proverbs prove themselves apparently false, let the trusted principles fail in some crisis, and instantly everything is swept away.

Over against this place the life of the humblest and most imperfect disciple who lives the life of faith. To

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him every moral triumph is more than a fulfilment of moral law, more than a block in the great temple of character; it is the manifestation of love for the heavenly Father, a strengthening of the family ties that bind together God and his child, a source of personal happiness for the present and a seed of hope for the eternal future. "The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life" is indeed a secret wholly unknown to the moral philosopher who builds his character day by day in dogged obedience to the lifeless principles of his science. Between mere moral character, however perfect, and a true Christian life and hope the distance is infinite. The one is a spiritual prison-house, costly and grand it may be, but still a prison, confining, repressing, galling the soul's true life; the other the "home of the soul," free, restful, joyous.

The ideas embodied in the words "house" and "home" are easily distinguishable, but the facts for which those words stand are never separable. True, you may have a house without a home, but you can never have a home without a house of some sort. Many of our noblest specimens of architecture were built for purposes far other than the furnishing of a home for man. Some of the most costly mansions of the wealthy fail to satisfy the craving of those who occupy them for homes. But the home-spirit must have a permanent structure, though it be the humblest, in which to take up its abode. The tent of the wandering Arab, the teepee of the wild Indian, the canvas-covered prairie-schooner of the emigrant, none of these could by any possibility become the seat of a true home. It is when man first builds a structure that affords at least some slight shadow of permanence that the notion of home becomes possible. Then and not till then does there spring up in the human life that element of strength that makes for national stability and continuance. From the tent of the nomad to the

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home in a fixed abode is a long stride in national life and civilization.

Following the analogy thus suggested, we may distinguish between character and salvation, but we can never separate them. A certain moral character we may have without eternal hope, but there can be no real hope for time and for eternity that is not coupled with a Christ-like character. True peace and rest of soul, the hope for eternity that cannot be shaken, dwell only in him who is conscious of a glad obedience to the words of the Master.

Doubtless many men have cherished a hope for the future, many have testified in glowing terms to their high expectation, whose characters have been far from Christly. (The writer of "Home, Sweet Home" was a homeless wanderer.) Doubtless also many have attained to a high degree of respectability, have justly earned a glorious reputation for moral excellence, who have cared nothing for God or for Jesus Christ. But how often have they been swept away by some great flood of temptation or trial! A house may stand if it be not too large upon the soft earth, so long as the sun shines and all is fair. It is the storm that undermines and overturns it. So the soul may cherish a delusive hope and may rest in self-satisfied comfort so long as all goes well, even though its hope be ill-founded. It is the storm and stress of life that test the value of spiritual foundations. By these the false hope is swept away, the mistaken confidence is undetermined and its weakness betrayed.

Here, then, we have the complete and perfect structure of the spiritual building that cannot be shaken. Deep and strong upon the rock Christ Jesus is laid the foundation of active obedience to his teachings. Upon this solid base rises grand and symmetrical the structure of a true Christian character, a saintly soul. This sanctified soul becomes the abode of a hope that can never be destroyed,

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a hope that shall live through all vicissitudes of time, and when time shall be no more shall blossom out into the realized bliss of eternity.

“Unfading Hope! when life’s last embers burn,
When soul to soul and dust to dust return,
Heaven to thy charge resigns the awful hour!
O, then thy kingdom comes! Immortal Power!
What though each spark of earth-born rapture fly,
The quivering lip, pale cheek, and closing eye!
Bright to the soul thy seraph hands convey
The morning dream of life’s eternal day—
Then, then, the triumph and the trance begin,
And all the phoenix-spirit burns within.”



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